JEEVADHARA

AGENDA OF THE CHURCH IN CIVIL SOCIETY - II

Edited by

Kuncheria Pathil

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Editorial

The greatest change made by the Second Vatican Council was a radical openness and commitment to the world mainly by the Council's Pastoral Constitution on Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*. It made very clear that the Church exists in the world and for the sake of the world which God loves so much. The Church is called to be the Light, Salt and Leaven of the world. Church's pastoral work does not simply mean taking care of the Christian community, but involvement and commitment for the radical transformation of the society. Hence Christian involvement and responsibility in the 'Civil Space' is seen in a new light as a real pastoral commitment. Civil Space is a quasi-independent space distinct from political State, economy and market forces. It is a free space where the public, religious, cultural and social movements, non-governmental organizations, social thinkers, critics and activists, media, people's movements etc work together for the welfare and authentic development of human society and a better world with freedom, justice and equality for all. One of the primary duties of the Church, as understood by Vatican II, is authentic transformation of humanity by involvement and commitment in the Civil Space. This Number of *Jeevadhara* is a continuation of Jeevadhara July 2014 which discussed the theme "Agenda of the Church in Civil Society". We could not include many important areas of the agenda in last year's number. Hence we thought of continuing the theme in this Number.

The issue of Human Rights is one of the universally accepted ideological frame work today for the discussion on the ethical and moral behaviour of individuals and nations. Therefore the promotion of human rights in the society and within the structures of the Church and in its mission has to be an important agenda of the Church today.

The author Varghese Theckanath in the first article introduces the issue of human rights and highlights the ambiguity on the part of the Church in this question. On the one hand, the Church has been in the forefront of the pursuit of human rights. But on the other, historical and cultural conditioning of the church, its structures and dogmatic positions do not often permit it to go beyond paying lip service to its ideals. The article attempts to point out some of the contradictions that exist in the church in relation to human rights, and to explore what directions the Church can take to provide models for the larger society to realize the values of human rights.

The second article deals with the current agrarian problems in India which are very acute. Majority of the people in India are farmers and they depend on agriculture for their livelihood. 50% of the farmers in India live in debt. 40% of the farmers are on the verge of quitting. The author, Joshy Cherian, highlights some of the problems very briefly, such as, the depletion of the natural resources like soil and water, climate change, increasing expenses in farming and the lack of available funds. The author proposes a new public structure in the agricultural sector for the promotion of rural agriculture and for rescuing the perishing farmers in the country. It is praiseworthy that the church in Kerala is taking a new lead in the agricultural sector by various programmes and projects for the farmers, such as, organizing the paddy, rubber and coconut farmers to overcome the present crises and by organizing awareness programmes against the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers.

In all spheres of public life everywhere in the world, especially in the Indian society today, corruption is the greatest and all-pervading evil and challenge. In the third article of this number, Shaji George Kochuthara, the eminent moral theologian in India, clarifies the notion of corruption and its impact on the society and the task of fighting corruption. He also highlights the Christian approach to corruption, which is considered both a sin and crime. He defines corruption as 'misuse of power for private benefit or advantage'. Any organized society considers corruption as a misuse of power, an injustice, a violation of basic human rights of others, and hence punishable by

law. Paradoxically, democratically elected governments themselves often become today the greatest violator of justice and human rights. In the concluding part of the article the author points out that all religions and the church have serious responsibility for engaging in the wider society, leading the fight against all social evils, especially, corruption. The most effective step in fighting corruption in the civil society is to make the Church itself corruption-free, so as to become a real "light of the world."

The fourth article deals with the problem of Religious Fundamentalism today and the role of religion in Civil society. Religious fundamentalism emerges when the authentic source and spirit of religion become dry and give way to quasi-religions and religious perversions. All religions teach and view fellow humans as co-pilgrims and colleagues for creating a new humanity characterized by love, peace and justice, whereas religious fundamentalism looks at members of other religions as a threat and enemy. It may be also seen as a psychological and social dynamics when any group faces threats and insecurity against its identity from outside. The author Saju Chackalackal explains the perspectives of religious fundamentalism and the fundamentalistic interpretations of religious scriptures which do violence to the authentic meaning and interpretations of scripture. He briefly examines the cases of Hindutva and the Caste system in Indian society today, and finally calls all religions to tackle religious fundamentalism together with their prophetic and critical spirit and contributing to the process of right and balanced education and conscientization.

In the last article by the editor, Kuncheria Pathil, highlights the present cultural crisis with the emergence of "Postmodernity" which is an all pervading new culture, ethos and new ways thinking and life-styles, and many people are not prepared to face this new challenge. The article starts with a short survey of the encounter of Christianity in history with the different cultures and peoples at the different periods of history. After the conversion of the Roman emperor to Christianity and the identification of the Church and the state, the European culture and society were built on the foundation of Christian faith and 'Christendom' became the all inclusive reality. The movements of

Enlightenment, the emphasis on reason, freedom and human subjectivity paved the way to Modernity and secularization. The new trends of Postmodern thinking and current discourses invite us to realize the limits of modernity and western rationality as well as cultural domination and the claims of 'absolute truth'. Postmodernity is a call to accept pluralism and the 'other' and to search the truth together, both friends and foes, Western cultures and Eastern cultures, Christianity and all other religions, all philosophies and wisdom. The article is an invitation to Christian theology to enter into a positive and critical dialogue with Postmodernity and the cultural process today.

The agenda of the Church in civil society, presented here, is still very incomplete, though we did on the same theme last year. May be, we have to pursue this theme further also in the next year. Many more areas have to be covered and many more perspectives have to be emerged. The focus here is on the mission of the Church in the world and in the civil society rather than within the structures of the church and pastoral care in the traditional meaning of shepherding exclusively the Christian communities. We call for a new pastoral praxis of the Church in the civil society.

Kuncheria Pathil
Editor
Jeevadhara, Kottayam

Human Rights Challenges and Opportunities for the Church in India Today

Varghese Theckanath

Promotion of human rights in the society and within the structures of the Church and in its mission is an important agenda of the Church in the civil society today. The author Varghese Theckanath introduces the issue of human rights and highlights the ambiguity on the part of the Church on this question. On the one hand, the Church has been in the forefront of the pursuit of human rights. But on the other, historical and cultural conditioning of the church, its structures and dogmatic positions do not often permit it to go beyond paying lip service to its ideals. Varghese Theckanath is a specialist on the study and promotion of Human Rights. He is a member of the Montfort Brothers of St Gabriel and currently the Founder-Director of Montfort Social Institute, at Hyderabad.

If there is a universally claimed ideological frame work to govern the ethical and moral behaviour of individuals and nations, it is the paradigm of human rights. However vulnerable its realization is in actual life, human rights have assumed an incomparable status when placed beside other ideologies and even religions, at least in the post-modern Western societies. Faced with practical materialism, political pragmatism, and moral and cultural relativism, human rights have come to occupy the ground vacated by metaphysical foundations. The Asian Continent that contributed a great deal to the evolution of the human rights paradigm through the many religious traditions that originated in it including Christianity has been on the other hand, less enthusiastic in lapping it up. But it is no doubt making inroads. Besides, the human

rights paradigm is here to stay by virtue of its own inner force. By the very same token, the promotion of human rights within the structures of the Church and its mission has major implications.

When confronted with the ethics of human rights, the Church finds itself in an ambiguous situation. On the one hand, it has been in the forefront of the pursuit of human rights. But on the other, historical and cultural conditioning of the church, its structures and dogmatic positions do not often permit it to go beyond paying lip service to its ideals. This paper attempts to point out some of the contradictions that exist in the church in relation to human rights, and to explore what directions the Church can take to provide models for the larger society to realize the values of human rights. We shall begin by understanding some of the challenges in India regarding human rights. We shall also look at the ambiguous position of the Church in pursuing the paradigm. The role of the Church in the contemporary formulation of human rights is highlighted. Finally, the ideological and practical implications are explored with a view to seek possible paths for an active engagement with the vision of human rights.

Contemporary Challenges

i) A Nation in Transition

India is witnessing rapid change. These affect the way people work and participate in the production process, their social structures, political institutions and cultural patterns. Traditional community values are under threat as also their political authorities and economic organisations. Communities are frequently faced with evictions from the only environment and life style they have known, in the name of development. There are new forms of exploitation of labour emerging. Feminisation of labour and its impact on women in terms of new forms of discrimination and violence is only one of these forms. Scarce resources are spent on armaments making India the largest weapons market. New forms of conflict and violence with their roots in ethnic differences, perverted ideologies, religious fundamentalism and ultra-nationalism are common. Governments both at the State and the Centre are arrogating new powers for themselves to exploit national resources. There is a paradigmatic shift in the definition of 'India' from the post

Independence era to the current dispensation in power. These and other points of transition pose grave challenges to human rights today.

ii) Historical Legacy

Historically speaking, neither rulers nor social structures in India have favoured respect for people's rights. Intricate political and ideological systems such as feudalism and caste have been devised to put reigns over people's rights. At the same time, there are numerous examples all over the country to show that people believe in their rights, they aspire for greater achievement of their rights, and they are bitter about denials of their rights. People are willing to make sacrifices for their rights. The anti-colonial struggles, the life and work of Dr. Ambedkar, Sree Narayana Guru, Jyotiba Phule as well as the many subaltern movements across the country provide testimony to this quest. There have also been some great exceptions to the general tendency of rulers in India not to be inclined to show respect for human rights. The reign of Emperor Asoka (272-231 B.C) is one such example. Some historians claim that Asoka's edicts constitute the world's first declaration on universal rights that included the whole community of life.[1] The contributions of the great religions in India to the development of human rights are obvious.

iii) Obstacles to Human Rights

In spite of the thirst for human rights in the hearts of people, there are major impediments to their realization. As Rose Wu has pointed out, there are generally at least *five* major obstacles to translating the ethics of human rights to commitment by governments in our continent to secure them in the daily life of people.[2] The *first* is the race for economic success by any means, pursued by our governments with the false belief that it will eventually benefit all people. Governments are willing to sacrifice rights and freedoms of their people until the economic goals are reached. But it has proved beyond doubt that such a development model has been widening the gap between the rich and

[1] S, Dhammika (Trans), *The Edicts of King Asoka*, (Khandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1993) at http://www.urbandharma.org/udharma/asoka

[2] Rose Wu, "Human Rights is a Matter of Choice", at http://www.archnetk.net/charter/mainfile/chinese_launch

the poor all over the world. The *second* obstacle comes from the attitude of those in power that civil and political rights are Western values that are not relevant to other regions. These values, they hold, do not go well with the need for social and political stability necessary for development. The *third* obstacle relates to the tendency to pick on the most vulnerable people such as the *Adivasis* to advance the new paradigm of development. As a result, many of these people have been further marginalized and have come to be seen as a lag on the country's progress.

The *fourth* relates to the rights of women and minorities, not only religious, but especially sexual minorities, single parents and others. It has become difficult to advocate the rights of these people in India, because they pose threats to traditional beliefs and customs. Advocating the rights of women is still considered a danger to men's privileged position in society. Surprisingly, the most outspoken groups that promote prejudice and a discriminatory attitude towards sexual minorities are the Church and the Islamic leadership. The very similar stand of the Church and of the Muslim Clergy in India after the judgment of the High Court of Delhi removing a British period law criminalizing same sex relationships is a case in point. This attitude reflects the need to view human rights as a universal value. No one's rights can be sacrificed in the name of religion, 'normal family' or social morality. The *fifth* obstacle pertains to the suppression of the freedom of belief, speech or even food habits. The grave violations of human rights both by governments and by sections of civil society, and the deliberate attempts to scuttle the aspirations of people for freedom, rights and democracy offer the Church in India, an important context to respond heroically to their prophetic calling.

The Human Rights Discourse

i) Universal Influence of Human Rights

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the United Nations Charter. The first mandate of the Charter was to adopt a universally applicable list of rights.[3] The same was fulfilled on 10 December, 1948 when the

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[3] Most important UN Documents regarding human rights including the UDHR are available at: http://www.un.org/aboutun/index.html.

Jniversal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted. Within a span of nearly seven decades since the adoption of the UDHR, luman rights have come to occupy the centre stage among the ideals of ethical relationships among peoples and nations. Its sweeping nfluence found an echo when Pope Benedict XVI addressed the UN General Assembly to mark the 60th anniversary of the UDHR in 2008.[4] Costas Douzinas, one of the best known critics of the human rights liscourse describes its sweep and influence succinctly:

> It unites the left and the right, the pulpit and the state, the minister and the rebel, the developing world and the liberals. Human rights have become the principle of liberation from oppression and domination, the rallying cry of the homeless and dispossessed, the political programme of revolutionaries and the dissidents. Alternative lifestyles, greedy consumers of goods and culture, the pleasure-seekers and playboys of the Western world, have all glossed their claims in the language of human rights. Human rights are the fate of post modernity, the energy of our societies, the fulfilment of the Enlightenment promise of emancipation and self-realization.[5]

i) Meaning of Human Rights

The word 'right' invokes two meanings: a moral sense of rectitude, and a political sense of entitlement.[6] In the sense of rectitude, we talk of something 'being right' as against something 'being wrong'. In the sense of entitlement on the other hand, we talk of someone 'having a right'. While in the sense of rectitude the focus is on a standard of conduct and the duty holder's obligation under the standard, in the sense of entitlement the focus is on the right holder's title to enjoy the right. In the day to day practice, the *assertive exercise* of a right activates the obligation of the duty-bearer to respect it or deny it. On the other hand, the 'duty-bearer' can take steps to *respect* the right even when it is not assertively claimed. The ideal situation is when

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For the full speech see,http://www.c-span.org/video/?204947-1/pope-benedict-xvi-speech

Costas Douzinas, *The End of Human Rights* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2000), 1.

For a discussion on the 'rights' language, see Jack Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 7ff.

rights can be enjoyed by everyone, everywhere, without assertive exercise by the rights holder or enforcement by the duty-bearer.

Rights become 'human rights' by the fact of the rights holder being human. The salient features of human rights are that they are *equal* for all; *inalienable* because one cannot stop being human; and are *universal* by the fact of being members of a common species called the *Homo sapiens*. After the long acrimony during the Cold War between the United States and its allies championing individual rights as enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the Soviet Union and its allies championing the collective rights, and the collective rights enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the international community declared once and for all at the Vienna Conference in 1993 that human rights are *indivisible.* All rights are equally important to be realized. Over the last decade in India, the economic, social and cultural rights that were confined to the Directive Principles of State Policy in Part IV of the Constitution have assumed flesh, bone and marrows through legislations that make rights such as education, fundamental right.

What makes rights formulation in the area of human rights particularly relevant is its *definiteness* and *binding* character, and the possibility of *claiming* it.[7] Governments are the primary duty bearers in the protection of human rights as well as in widening its scope. Accountability of non-state actors who exercise quasi-state powers such as corporations, commercial cartels, private armed groups and religious institutions, are yet to be fully established. Protection of human rights is not just an abstract idea; rather, it has to be secured by law. India has a long way to go in this regard.

Human Rights and the Church
i) *Judeo-Christian Tradition*

Human Rights as we have them today have evolved from many streams codified into legal documents that provide a frame work for

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[7] "Claiming" raises problems in certain cultures such as in Asia and Africa where it may be frowned upon. So is the case with most religious traditions including the Catholic Church where claim for rights are seen as inappropriate. See, Lindsey Ellin "A Rights Based Approach to Development: An Exploration of Cultural Relativism and Universality of Human Rights". www.brandeis.educ/gsa/gradjournal/2006.

ethical behaviour between nations and among peoples.[8] Even though these formulations are clothed in a secular language that is acceptable to all shades of opinion, it is hard to deny that the historical foundations of human rights lie in the humanist strand that run through the world's great religions, not the least of all, the Judeo-Christian tradition. Under One God, the creator and master of the whole of creation, all humankind is visualised as a unity, with each race existing for the other (Micah 4:1-5). The Covenant people are called to serve God's will towards all nations, rather than exist to enjoy special privileges. The code of morality whether in the Decalogue in the Old Testament or in the Sermon on the Mount, formulated as obligations, are guarantees of the rights of others. Historically, the Church has been a harbinger of the rights of the poor and the vulnerable as few others.

i) The Dark Epochs

Enlightenment, Reformation, formation of nation states that were independent of papal authority and Socialism, however, invited strong reactions from the Church. It was suspicious of dissent, and of any secularly founded notion of rights. Burning at stakes, imprisonments and other similar punishments were meted out to the propagators of these notions as a matter of routine. In the *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) Pope Pius IX proclaimed that it is erroneous to claim such rights as freedom of speech and religion. As a prelude to the clouds of revolution that were gathering in France, in 1766, Pope Clement XIII condemned the very idea of freedom of thought and expression in his encyclical *Christianae Rei publicae.* But by the end of the nineteenth century, Pope Leo XIII imbibed the rights language in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), addressing the very issues the Socialists had talked about in the preceding years: condition of the working classes, family, equal participation of citizens and the possession of property. He also wrote on the condition of slaves and abolition of slavery (1888 and 1890).

For a view of the seminal texts that have influenced the modern formulation of human rights, see, Micheline R. Ishay, *The Human Rights Reader: Major Political Essays, Speeches, and the Documents From the Bible to the Present,* (New York: Routledge, 1997)

iii) *The Contemporary Era*

No matter what the stand of the church has been in the evolutionary phase of the discourse, it played a substantial role during the formulation of the current human rights paradigm, beginning with the UDHR. During World War II, the idea of a common standard that all nations can adhere to in the shape of an international bill of rights gained wide acceptance. Pope Pius XII in a radio address to mark the 50th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* in June 1941, was one of the first to call for such an international bill recognizing rights that flowed from the dignity of the person.[9] There were other similar calls during the war years, most notably from the U. S. President Franklin Roosevelt who talked about the "Four Freedoms" (1941).[10]

Subsequently, the intervention of several Latin American countries that constituted twenty one of the original fifty-five member nations of the UN, substantially influenced both the decision to formulate a Bill of Rights and the establishment of the Human Rights Commission. In the search by the Commission to find a common ground on which the Bill can be based so that it will be acceptable to people of all nations and cultures, one of the important philosophers of the time they consulted was Jacques Maritain, the then French Ambassador to the Vatican, the foremost proponent of Thomism in the 20th century, and towards the end of his life, an associate member of the community of the Little Brothers of Jesus. He was an important contributor to the formulation of the UDHR. Teilhard de Chardin, the Jesuit philosopher and palaeontologist was another one of those who shared his thoughts on the Declaration.

iv) *Influence of the Social Encyclicals*

As Pope Benedict XVI acknowledges, the Universal Declaration "was the outcome of a convergence of different religious and cultural traditions, all of them motivated by the common desire to place the human person at the heart of institutions, laws and the workings of

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[9] Mary Ann Giendon presents the Catholic influence on the UDHR in her article, "The Sources of 'Rights Talk'", *Commonweal,* (October 12, 2001) 11-13.

[10] The freedom of speech, the freedom of worship, the freedom from want, and the freedom from fear. See, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/pdfs/fftext.pdf

society, and to consider the human person essential for the world of culture, religion and science."[11] Among these traditions are the social teachings of the Church.[12] "Inherent dignity" and "worth of the human person"; human person "endowed with reason and conscience"; the right to form trade unions; the worker's right to just remuneration for oneself and the family; the family as the "natural and fundamental group unit of society"; and the prior right of parents to choose the education of their children, are features of the Declaration that is a reflection of the social encyclicals *Rerum Novarum*(1891) and *Quadragesimo anno* (1931). This can be attributed to Charles Malik, one of the most influential advocates of the social and economic rights as found in the Declaration, the Lebanese Arab member of the Human Rights Commission. *Rerum novarum* and *Quadragesimo anno* were among his most frequently referred books during the period.[13] Further, these encyclicals had found their way into the twentieth century constitutions of many Latin American and Continental European countries, thanks to Christian Democratic and Christian Socialist parties in these countries. All these along with other strands of inspiration, crystallized into the Universal Declaration.

v) UDHR and the Popes

The French Member of the Commission, Rene Cassin, a secular Jew as he described himself, openly acknowledged in his memoirs, the influence that the then Nuncio in Paris, Angelo Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII, had on him as he along with other members of the Commission were finalizing the Draft, and then mobilizing international support for the final vote on the Declaration. It is not surprising then, that Pope John XXIII in *Pacem in terris* (1963) calls the Universal Declaration "an act of the highest importance."[14] This is a tradition that will continue into the Documents of the Vatican II. It acknowledges

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[11] Pope Benedict XVI Address to the UN General Assembly, http://cnsblog.wordpress.com/2008/04/18/text-of-the-pope-to-the-un-general-assembly

[12] Mary Ann Glendon, ibid. p 12

[13] Ibid.

[14] Pope John XXIII went on to give expression to a 'Catholic Charter of Human Rigths'. This was in contrast to the total silence of his predecessor when UDHR was adopted in 1948.

that the identification and proclamation of human rights by the community of nations is among the most significant steps to respond effectively to the question of human dignity and its violation (*Dignitatis Humanae,* 1).[15] The rights enunciated by the UDHR find their way into the texts of Vatican II, especially in *Gaudium et Spes* (1965).

Pope John Paul II takes this even further. Speaking at the 34th General Assembly of the United Nations, he calls the Declaration "a true milestone on the path of humanity's moral progress" (1979). Further, he affirms that the UDHR "remains one of the highest expressions of the human conscience of our time"[16] The language of rights that the Church has increasingly used in the recent years in the place of traditional 'obligations' was however tempered down during Pope Benedict's Papacy. Chapter four of *Caritas in Veritate* for instance focuses not on rights *per se*, but on rights in relation to obligations. Pope Francis has consistently stood on the side of those who have been deprived of their rights: "In many parts of the world, there seems to be no end to grave offences against fundamental human rights, especially the right to life and the right to religious freedom."[17] His recent Encyclical, *Laudato Si, talks* of the right of all for a development that is sustainable, inclusive and cares for the earth, *Our Common Home.*[18]

vi) *Expediency and 'Doublespeak'?*

All these go to show that the church has been among the great advocates of human rights in our times. With its large network of health, educational and social programmes among the poorest people, it

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[15] *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church,* (Bombay: St. Paul's Publications, 2004) 112.

[16] Address to the 50th General Assembly of the UN, 5 October, 1995.

[17] Pope Francis, *Message,* World Day of Peace, 2014, § 1. In his private conversations with Marcelo Marquez and Andres Albertsenhe expressed his support for the spiritual needs of homosexual people and is reported to have said, "If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge them?" See, http://edition.cnn.com/2013/03/20/world/americas/argentina-pope-civil-unions

[18] http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

understands violations of rights of the most vulnerable. But gaps remain. To point out only two, as George Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury pointed out in an interview, religions "have enormous networks and great influence at the local level, but are fairly invisible when it comes to being seen by governments."[19] This is true of the Church in many parts of India. In most cases, our leadership is not sufficiently politically savvy to influence policies and programmes at the macro-level to protect rights.

Secondly, the church leadership is rather selective when it comes to taking a political stand on issues. For example, the Bill on reproductive rights in Philippines some years ago raised a great deal of debate in which the Church was rightly involved. There were contrasting claims within the Church with a majority taking a pro-life stand, while others going for pro-choice. Around the same time, an SWS survey reported that 3.3 million households or about 20 million Philippinose experienced involuntary hunger. Considering the population of the country and the vulnerabilities of the people under consideration, this should have been considered a national catastrophe. But there were hardly any voices raised by the Church against the right of the poor for food. Similar is the case in India where the Church has fought long battles for 'freedom of religion'. The response of the Church to the *GharVapasi* program of the Hindu right wing is a recent example. But where are our voices of protest against the violence unleashed by the State and the Corporate sector on the poor fighting for survival and land in the tribal heartlands? We can point out many such examples of expediency and self-preservation gaining over the rights of the poor.

Such instances of deliberate and selective amnesia is an indication of the mind-set of the Church that generally want to be 'politically correct' whether they are in the majority as in Philippines, or in a minority as in India.[20] Such 'doublespeak' is even starker when issues such as freedom of conscience, gender equality, and equal rights for all are raised within the Church.

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[19] www.phnompenhpost.com/national/grave-responsibility

[20] Jose Ma. Montelibano, "Silence in the Face of Hunger", *Religious Perspectives on Human Rights*, Vol. 10 No. 36, (October 27, 2008) at http://www.rghr.net

Opportunities for the Church

The human rights paradigm throws up many challenges for the Church in India today. Some of these are internal and ideological, such as the image of God and the model of the Church. Others have larger implications. These challenges are opportunities to find a new relevance for the Church in India.

i) Image of God

The Bill of Rights is silent on the question of the source and the ground of the inherent dignity of every human being and its normative force (UDHR, *Preamble*). The Christian ground for the morality of human rights is that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God. We learn from Catechism that the God in whose image we are created is a Trinitarian God: "A God who is equal, and different," as one of the early Church Fathers expressed it. "At the heart of theTrinitarian doctrine is our conviction that God is not an autonomous monad. Rather, for Christians, the divine being is constituted by personhood, a threefold being-in-relationship. The Trinitarian persons are not autonomous individualities but subsistent relations."[21] This Trinitarian faith is the Christian ground of human rights.

But in popular theology and the actual practice, such a Trinitarian image of God is of little relevance. The hierarchical nature of the Church, the 'ontologically different character' that ordination confers on the hierarchy, the status of women in the Church and other issues that are held as core to its faith, will not stand the scrutiny of the equality that the image of a Trinitarian God confers on the Believers. In India where accidents of birth and privilege create social divisions and discrimination, a non-hierarchical and non-discriminative Church can be a significant marker for human rights.

ii) Models of the Church

The organizational model of the Church influences how it practices human rights. Among the many models[22] proposed by Vatican II, the

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[21] Richard Gaillardetz, "Theologian explores Vatican II teaching on the Priesthood", *Western Catholic Reporter,* (November, 2, 2009) at http://www.wcr.ab.ca/news/2009

[22] Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Image/Doubleday, 2002)

Institutional Model advocated in Chapter III of *Lumen Gentium* with its focus on institutional boundaries and structural rigidity, have an upper hand in the Church today. Whereas, the Servant Model of the *Gaudium et spes* and that of Pope Francis has few takers in the Church. But it offers the Church tremendous potential to be actively engaged in social transformation in dialogue and cooperation. This model if assiduously imbibed in its self-understanding can transform the Church into a frontline advocate of human rights.

iii) Obligation vs. Rights

Much of the ethical and moral discourse in religions is in the language of the obligations of the 'duty bearer' rather than the rights of the 'rights holder'. It is so in the Christian moral and ethical tradition as well. The obligation for charity and compassion rules the mind set of much of the work of the Church rather than the protection of the rights of people. Deposing before the Commission to enquire into child abuses in Ireland, dioceses and religious communities admitted to abuses by their members, but the excuse they gave for inaction by the authorities on the abusers was that the abusers were repentant, and that they were determined to change themselves. The question of the violation of rights of children abused was seldom answered![23] For a Church that is traditionally used to clothe its mission in the language of obligation, it is important to assume the rights perspective.

iv) Mission of the Church

1. Rights Perspectives in Mission: Much of the work of the Church in India are within the realm of economic, social and cultural rights, whether they are engaged in the field of education, health care, social services or others. This is the strength of the Church in India. Developing these ministries within the rights perspective can provide a prophetic edge to its institutions and works.

2. Corporate Commitment to Rights: Given some salutary exceptions, struggles for civil and political rights normally do not form a part of the mission of the Church. In the face of new and grave violations of freedoms and rights, the Church has a responsibility to speak up against

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[23] At http://www.childabusecommission.ie/index.html

it. A new conviction needs to develop in the Church that 'to be religious is to be political'. We also need new skills and attitudes to pursue this. Further, developing abilities of institutions and administrative structures to take a corporate stand on issues of violations of human rights can give them a new reason for existence.

3. Rights of the Future Generations: An equally important lacuna in the mission of the Church is its non-involvement, acknowledging the exceptions, with achieving what has come to be called 'rights of the future generations': right to sustainable development, clean environment, peace, freedom from fear of a nuclear holocaust etc. But in many ways, these rights provide the direction of the future of the mission of the Church. Pope Francis has given us a lead in it with his new Encyclical. Equipping ourselves with skills, knowledge and structures for advocacy, campaigns and networking to secure these rights pose a new challenge for the Church in India.

4. Human Rights Education: Human rights education that transforms attitudes, provide skills and change institutional cultures at every level of our life and mission is a mandate for our times. This obviously has to be reflected in the way young people are formed, communities and institutions/works are administered, authority is exercised and spirituality is lived. Our forms of worship, the hymns we sing, the sermons we preach, the way men and women relate, decision making and administrative processes, and other areas of our lives need to be thoroughly reviewed in the light of human rights. As individuals and communities that reflect the eschatological reality, this is a major challenge as well as opportunity for the Church in India.

Conclusion

The task of human rights is not to talk about it, but to realize it. Even a cursory look at the development of human rights whether it is in the global context, the India context, or in the church, show us that whatever has been achieved have not come easy by any measure. It has been the result of struggles, blood and tears of generations of women and men all over the world who fought for these rights at great personal sacrifices. We are fortunate to live at a time when there is a universal acceptance that human rights are an idea whose time has

come. That does not make the task of the realization of human rights any easier. The situation of human rights in India especially that of the most vulnerable sections, bear ample testimony to it. The situation is not any different in the Church. Whether the Church that is potentially a vital force in the country, is willing to render our hearts, hands and minds along with millions of our people who cherish the dream freedom, democracy and rights, is the big question before us. We can only rest when the principles of the God given vision of human rights are fully applied everywhere, for everyone. For, human rights is the new promise of the Kingdom that is dawning in our midst today.

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Current Agrarian Crises
and a Response

Joshy Cherian

This article deals with the current agrarian problems in India which are very acute. Majority of the people in India are farmers and they depend on agriculture for their livelihood. 50% of the farmers in India live in debt. 40% of the farmers are on the verge of quitting. The author, Joshy Cherian, highlights some of the problems very briefly, such as, the depletion of the natural resources like soil and water, climate change, increasing expenses in farming and the lack of available funds. The author proposes a new public structure in the agricultural sector for the promotion of rural agriculture and to rescue the perishing farmers in the country. Dr. Joshy V. Cherian has a Ph. D. in environmental science from Bharathiar University, Coimbatore. His specialization is in the areas of natural resource management, organic agriculture and solid waste management. He is the promoter and Managing Director of Omega Ecotech Products, India, Coimbatore.

The Problem

Majority of the people in India are farmers and they depend on Agriculture for their livelihood. 50% of the farmers in India live in debt. 40% of the farmers are on the verge of quitting. Every half an hour 16 farmers attempt suicide in India.

Migration to cities is creating major crises in the cities.

The major reasons for these agrarian crises are depletion of all the major natural resources on which farming is dependent. They are as follows:

Soil

Soil which is the most important natural resource is facing a serious depletion. Because of excessive use of chemicals in agriculture and shift of manuring from organic to chemical the organic matter level of Indian soils are very poor today. In tropical soil the oxidation rate of organic matter is continuous and very high. If we do not replenish the loss continuously by introducing organic matter, the soil will soon get depleted of organic matter. Most of the Indian soils have only ¼ of the required level of organic matter today.

The poor organic matter level has resulted in poor physical character of the soil and poor buffering capacity of the soil. The top soil has become very hard and pH variation is very severe in most soils.

The poor organic matter has also resulted in poor earthworm population and poor microbial load of the soil. In a healthy soil we have approx. 30 to 40 lakh earth worms per acre of soil. Today we have only a few lakh worms or sometimes no worms at all. Similarly in a healthy soil we should be having 10 to 15 tons of microbes per acre of soil. But today we do not have even a few tons of microbes. These two factors have severely affected the fertility of the soil. It is the soil microbes which are mediating the nutrient cycling and absorption of nutrients by plants. The beneficial microbes also help in controlling various plant diseases and pests. Because of poor organic matter in the soil the soil temperature is going very high during summer months releasing a lot of infrared radiation from the top soil, severely affecting the health of the plant and quality and quantity of produce. In cool environments poor soil organic matter is resulting in very low temperatures in the root zone during the winter. This situation is also very unhealthy for the plant roots.

Water

Kerala and most of India receive more than 50 lakh liters of water per acre every year by the two monsoons.

Because of poor organic matter status the soil has lost the capacity to retain the rain water in the root zone. Most of the rain water is either running off or leaching down taking away the top soil and soluble

nutrients from the soil. A healthy soil with good organic matter can hold 20 to 30 lakh liters of water per acre which will keep the root zone adequately moist.

The air water balance which is very important is depleted in most soils making the plant very weak.

Pest and Disease

The weak plants are susceptible to disease and pests and today a lot of commercial crops are facing serious challenges from pest and disease e.g., Coconut (root wilt and Red palm weevil) Pepper (phytophthora), Tea (tea mosquitoes, red spider mite) Banana (pseudo stem borer). These challenges have literally wiped out the crops in various areas.

In order to overcome the pest and disease problems farmers are using costly and dangerous chemicals in large dozes. This is making the farming unviable and this is also resulting in dangerous levels of residue in our food and water. These dangerous chemicals are causing severe health hazard to farm labourers, farmers and all the people living in the vicinity of the farms. Kerala has the highest incidence of Diabetic, Kidney, Liver and Cancer diseases in India. This is because we are consuming food with high levels of chemical residue and drinking water with a lot of dangerous chemicals coming from the farm into our wells.

Human Resource

The farm labourers are leaving the farms and taking up other works because of better pay, better living conditions. The alternate jobs are less tedious and tiresome.

The farmers are also not willing to toil in the farm. They are looking for white collar jobs which are less tiring and more paying. Therefore the youngsters are not willing to take up farming as an occupation. Only the old people who have no other option are continuing with agriculture.

High Cost of Production

The cost of cultivation has increased many folds in the last few years. Farmers are buying everything right from seed to almost all the

inputs required for farming. The price of these inputs is going up every year.

Because of severe pest and disease problems the frequency of application of costly chemicals are increasing. The chemical cost and the labour cost are very high.

Agriculture has become very expensive because of repeated use of expensive chemicals and very expensive labour. The cost of chemicals and labour has increased many folds in the last 30 to 40 years. But the price of agricultural produce has not increased correspondingly. Therefore agricultural operations are not attractive from a financial perspective.

The labour is in big shortage in the agriculture sector and the available labour is quite expensive. Another major setback is the poor output from the labourers because of lack of skill and commitment to work. Timely completion of work does not happen because of labour scarcity.

Availability of cost effective and adequate finance is another major challenge the farmers are facing. The RBI has mandated at least 18% of the bank's lending to be in agro sector. But almost all the banks are lending only up to 10%. Even the 10% finance goes to rich farmers. Because of lack of cost effective and adequate finance from banks, farmers are depending on local money lenders. This is a very expensive and dangerous credit. These local credit providers are also often the input suppliers and crop procuring people in the rural sectors. This situation is causing a severe disadvantage to the farmers leading to extensive farmer suicides.

Lack of Funds and Marketing Support

There is hardly any marketing support in terms of proper storage facilities and cool rooms extended to the farmers. The farmers are often left to the mercy of middle men. Studies have shown that in India there are 5 to 7 levels of middle men. Because of lack of proper market information the farmers are not in a position to command good prices.

Because of poor rural infrastructure, unscientific handling of perishables by the middlemen, the loss at the post-harvest level of

perishables is to the tune of 30 to 40%. The burden of all these loss
rests with the primary producer.

Because of lack of resources, technology and knowledge the farmers
are not able to put up value addition facilities for their produce. The
co-operative movement which helped organize the farmers is not really
doing their job because of political and bureaucratic interference.

The agricultural research organizations in India are not sensitive to
the need of the farmer and they are not able to provide proper solutions
to the various challenges the farmers are facing especially in the post-
harvest sector.

Unorganized farmers are not able to leverage political and
bureaucratic support. Therefore the policies formulated by the
governments are often against the interest of the farmers. Even the
beneficial schemes announced by the governments do not reach the
farmers because of corruption at the political and bureaucratic level.

Climate Change

Climate change related challenges are a new set of challenges the
farmers are today faced with. It has become extremely difficult for
the farmers to overcome the challenges thrown up by climate change.
The common expression of climate change impacts are erratic rain,
very high temperature, strong winds etc., we have not succeeded in
predicting the climate change impacts so far. We have not been able
to come up with meaningful insurance coverage or compensatory
support schemes to help the farmers to overcome the climate change
challenges.

In my opinion the church can play a major role in supporting the
farmers in overcoming the challenges they are facing today. Today
we have come to a stage where this kind of an intervention is no more
optional but mandatory. Our population is more than 120 crores and it
is still growing. There is a huge need for quality food and other
requirements available from the farm. Therefore we have no option
but revive agriculture in India.

Urgent Need to Create a New Structure

We need to create a *structure or institution* which should address the following challenges. We should have a team of resourceful people associated with this structure. This structure should have self-sustaining model. The task of this new structure may be delineated as follows:

1) Organizing the farmers into groups based on the crop.

2) Evolving a supply chain management program for each crop starting from soil to the point it reaches the consumer. We need to identify each link in the chain. We also need to study the strength and weakness of each link. We have to find ways to strengthen each link in the chain only then the chain will be strong. We should also take steps to go up to the maximum level in the value chain of each crop. All the resources required for the supply chain management namely infrastructure, finance, technology, human resource etc., should be put in place.

3) Evolving steps to prevent the further degradation of our natural resources. This structure should also provide solutions to enhance the depleted natural resource.

When we discuss about depletion of natural resources in agriculture we have seen that the soil depletion is the greatest and immediate challenge. We can solve this problem by converting all the bio waste we are generating today and which itself has evolved into a major problem for the modern societies, into quality organic manure and improve our soil. I am happy to say that we have very efficient cost effective technology for converting all types of bio waste into quality organic manure.

4) This structure should also find ways to provide cost effective finance to the farm sector, help put up required infrastructure support, make available appropriate solutions by internal research or by sourcing solutions from any other source across the world. This structure should also find ways to minimize the climate change impacts in the supply chain management. Find ways to provide adequate insurance cover to farmers.

5) We must also help the farmers to come together and take steps to market their produce and also do value addition to the extent possible at each level.

6) This structure should also take steps to help to potential entrepreneurs in the field of Agro- business.

7) Empower the farmers to identify the policy challenges they are facing and take corrective steps by political and legal methods.

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Fighting Corruption
without Compromise

Shaji George Kochuthara

In this article the author, one of the eminent moral theologians in India, clarifies the notion of corruption and its impact on the society and the task of fighting corruption. He also highlights the Christian approach to corruption, which is considered both a sin and crime. In the concluding part of the article the author points out that all religions and the church have serious responsibility of engaging in the wider society, leading the fight against all social evils, especially, corruption. The most effective step in fighting corruption in the civil society is to make the Church itself corruption-free from top to bottom. Dr. Shaji George Kochuthara is the former Registrar of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, and at present he is the Chief Editor of the International Journal *Asian Horizons* and the Head of the Department of Moral Theology.

1. Introduction

No country in the world is totally free from the cancer of corruption. It is a global phenomenon. Corruption existed almost always in various forms. What is new, perhaps, is the breadth, width and depth of corruption that destroys the whole social fabric. Every day we wake up with new stories of corruption, and we go to sleep hearing other nightmarish stories of corruption. Perhaps we are no more shocked by these stories; rather, we are surprised only if we do not hear new revelations of corruption. The picture is grim if we look at some of the major scams in India exposed in the recent years:

Commonwealth Games scam: Corruption involved: Rs.8000 crores.

Adarsh Housing Society Scam: Corruption involved: hundreds of crores of rupees.

2G Spectrum Scam: The loss of income caused to the government in the selling of 2G Spectrum: Rs. 175000 crores! However, recent reports indicate that this is an inflated amount - perhaps for political motives?

Hasan Ali Khan, a stud farm owner, is accused of tax evasion of Rs. 50000 crores.

Two ministers of Karnataka state, the Reddy brothers, are accused of illegal mining worth Rs. 50000 crores (at least!). Unaccounted money seized from Ketan Desai, the former President of the Medical Council of India, who was dismissed for corruption charges is more than 1000 crores.

The unaccounted money deposited in foreign banks by Indian nationals, according to reports, is more than Rs. 7000000 crores, belonging mainly to politicians, bureaucrats and rich businessmen. Although this was one of the key accusations against the UPA government in the last national election, and promises were there that this money would be brought back within months if BJP would come into power, but so far nothing has happened.

All these are only a part of the bigger story! From the local leaders to the central ministers, from peons to top bureaucrats, police officials, lawyers, judges, almost everyone is marred by corruption. Without bribery, it is almost impossible to get things done. Not only politics and public administrative system, but also service sectors like healthcare and education (whether they are government or private institutions), NGOs, sports and entertainment business and so on are marred by corruption. Corruption occurs in India in manifold forms: petty corruption, that is payment of small amounts for frequent transactions, tax evasion, embezzlement, 'speed money' (to get the necessary documents and permits in time), bribery to get jobs, demanding money or other favours in return of jobs, capitation fee for admissions in schools and colleges, large scale bribery to ensure contracts, kickbacks, collusions, favouritism, nepotism, demanding and offering sexual favours, etc. As Justice N. Santosh Hegde says, "Every day we wake up with new stories of corruption, and we go to bed hearing other nightmarish stories of corruption. Perhaps we are no more shocked by

these stories; rather, we are surprised only if we do not hear new revelations of corruption. The amount of money involved in corruption is constantly escalating - millions, billions, the number of digits is on the increase."[1]

Is the private sector free of corruption? Educational institutions, hospitals and other healthcare institutions, IT companies, etc. do not seem to be free from corruption. Not only that they evade rules and regulations to amass wealth, but also individuals working in these institutions misuse their power and position to gain monetary benefits and other favours. Even the IT field, where quality and excellence matters, does not seem to be free from corruption. Those in charge of appointments and department contracts are said to ask and receive bribes. Perhaps corruption in the private sector is yet to get the attention of the public.

2. Understanding Corruption

Corruption comes from the Latin root, *corrumpere*, to break. This word refers to the breaking of integrity, morality, dishonesty of every stripe, debasement and depravity. It may take many forms, namely, political, corporate, legal, intellectual, police and more.[2] A definition of corruption may not be so easy. Corruption can be said to be the "misuse of power for private benefit or advantage. This power may, but need not reside in the public domain. Besides money, the benefit can take the form of promotion, special treatment, commendation, or the favours of women or men... In ordinary parlance corruption simply means asking, giving or taking a fee, gift or favours as a condition for performance of one's legal or assigned responsibility."[3] This definition/

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[1] N. Santosh Hegde, "Development and Corruption. Re-Establishing Justice for the Common Good," in Saju Chackalackal, CMI, ed., *Towards a Strong Global Economic System: Revealing the Logic of Gratuitousness in the Market Economy,* Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2013, 44.

[2] Conrad K. Sangma, "Corruption: The Malaise of Democracy," *Asian Horizons* 6, 1 (2012) 17.

[3] M.A. Coker, "Corruption and Direct Foreign Investment in Nigeria" in *Sophia: An African Journal of Philosophy,* Vol. 9, No. 1, September, 2006, 91.

description is rather comprehensive, but evidently, this also does not include all types of corruption.[4]

3. Corruption and Democracy

Prevalence and escalation of corrupt practices raise some burning questions about the political and economic systems. A good number of nations follow the democratic system. Compared to other systems, democracy can be said to be rather new, but so far we do not have a better alternative for democracy. But we cannot ignore the fact that we are witnessing uncontrolled corruption and corrosion of values which lead to the degeneration and failure of the democratic system. "Politics have been identified as a propitious place for thieves and robbers."[5] Democratically elected governments themselves often become the greatest violator of justice and human rights.[6] The legal system is not an exception; for example consider the Indian scenario: "There are thousands of poor people fighting the legal system. The legal system is very colonial and access to justice for the poor is impossible. In fact, the legal system is a great engine of oppression of the poor."[7] As a result, in many countries, democracy is no more the rule by the people, but the rule by a few politicians, often motivated by power and economic gain.[8] "Corruption undermines the culture of democracy. When people lose confidence that public decisions are taken for reasons that are publicly available and justifiable, they often become cynical about public speech and deliberation."[9]

[4] For a detailed definition of different types of corruption, please seewww.transparency.org/ publications/ publications/other/plain_ language_guide. It offers definitions and links for 45 key terms related to corruption; see also www.corruptionmonitor.com/ definitionofcorruption.html

[5] Zacharias, "Dreaming of a New Moral Theology for Brazil," in *Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church. The Plenary Papers from the First Cross-cultural Conference on Catholic Theological Ethics*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2009, reprinted, (Hereafter CTEWC), 116.

[6] Cfr Antonio Papisca, "The Needs of the World and the Signs of the Times," in CTEWC, 15-16.

[7] Payal Saxena, "David vs. Goliath," in *The Week*, 28, 33 (July 11, 2010) 21.

[8] Thomas Hong-Soon Han, "Moral Challenges and the Church in Asia Today, with a Specific Consideration of Korea," in CTEWC, 67-68; Sebastian Mier, "Hope in the Midst of Enormous Challenges in Mexico," in CTEWC, 128.

[9] Conrad K. Sangma, "Corruption: The Malaise of Democracy," *Asian Horizons* 6, 1 (2012) 17.

4. Corruption, Globalization and Neo-Liberalism

Globalization and neo-liberalism, the prevalent socio-economic system today, has given new faces to corruption. A study published in November 2010 by Global Financial Integrity (GFI), an international advocacy group, corruption in India has increased considerably after liberalization. According to its report, between 2002 and 2006, the loss to the government was 16 billion dollars (720 billion rupees) per year.[10] As Arundhati Roy points out,

> Twenty years ago, when the era of "liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation" descended on us, we were told that public sector units and public infrastructure needed to be privatised because they were corrupt and inefficient. We were told the problem was systemic. Now that nearly everything has been privatised, when our rivers, mountains, forests, minerals, water supply, electricity and communications systems have been sold to private corporations, we find that corruption has grown exponentially; the growth rate of corruption has surpassed everything we could possibly imagine.[11]

In recent years, one of the areas of widespread corruption in India has been the acquisition of land, especially for the multinational corporations. What Medha Patkar said at a public meeting in Bangalore on 9 July 2011 deserves our attention: "Various kinds of corruption affecting the masses and said corporates are plundering the natural resources of Karnataka. Land is not soil anymore. It's gold." Patkar said that the definition of corruption needs to be expanded to mean not just misappropriation of money, but also 'corporate corruption' that includes forcibly taking away farmers' land for industries and giving huge tax concessions to companies at the cost of the greater common good. According to her, any anti-corruption legislation should address the manipulation of laws by the 'corporate-builder-politician-bureaucrat

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[10] Melwyn Pinto, "Have We Failed Democracy in India?," *Integral Liberation* 15, 2 (2011) 85.

[11] Arundhati Roy, "Confronting Empire," *Outlook India.com*, Jan 30, 2003: http://www.outlookindia.com/article. aspx?218738#.T3rEnhKYxIU, accessed on 03-04.2012. http://www. indianexpress.com/news/-when-corruption-is-viewed-fuzzily-/783688/0

nexus'. She also pointed out that in the last six years the Government of India wrote off corporate income tax worth Rs. 374937 crore.[12] Special privileges and exemptions to corporates may be needed to attract them. But, when this is at the cost of the poor, denying their basic human rights, it is to be reconsidered. Moreover, often behind such deals and agreements, politicians and bureaucrats get crores of rupees for easy deals according to the terms and conditions of the corporates. Thus, corruption betrays the interests of the ordinary people, especially the poor. Speaking at *Life After Capitalism* at the "World Social Forum.2003," Porto Alegre, Brazil, January 27, 2003, organised by Znet, Arundhati Roy said,

> As the disparity between the rich and the poor grows, the fight to corner resources is intensifying. To push through their 'sweetheart deals', to corporatize the crops we grow, the water we drink, the air we breathe, and the dreams we dream, corporate globalization needs an international confederation of loyal, corrupt, authoritarian governments in poorer countries to push through unpopular reforms and quell the mutinies.[13]

What Pope Francis says in his encyclical *Laudato Si* deserves our serious attention in this context: "An assessment of the environmental im-pact of business ventures and projects demands transparent political processes involving a free exchange of views. On the other hand, the forms of corruption which conceal the actual environ-mental impact of a given project, in exchange for favours, usually produce specious agreements which fail to inform adequately and to allow for full debate."[14] The Pope is proposing here new national and local policies for the taking care of the environment, but shows a clear awareness of the impact of corruption on the environment. Thus, corruption affects not only human beings, but the whole earth. With globalization as the bargaining power of the multinational companies has considerably

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[12] *The Hindu*, 10 July 2011, 5. Cfr. John Durocher's, "The State of India," *Integral Liberation* 15, 2 (2011) 155-156.

[13] Arundhati Roy, "Confronting Empire," *Outlook India.com*, Jan 30, 2003: http://www.outlookindia.com/article. aspx?218738#.T3rEnhKYxIU, accessed on 03-04.2012.

[14] Francis, *Laudato Si*, 182.

increased, this impact has become more direct and threatening even for the very existence of our planet.

It can be said that one of the effects of globalization is the globalization of corruption and its reinforcement. Besides escalating the amounts involved in corruption, globalization has resulted in new forms and ways of exploitation and denial of justice to favour the powerful and the multinationals.

5. Can the Church do anything to fight Corruption?

If the Church believes that, "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ,"[15] it cannot ignore corruption. There is a deeper awareness that "Corruption stands in radical contrast" to the principles of the dignity of the human person, the common good, solidarity, subsidiarity, the preferential option for the poor, the universal destination of goods, the principles which are central to the Church's engagement with the society.[16]

We may wonder whether the Church can do anything in fighting corruption, as it is so widespread and deep-rooted. We may also ask what, especially in India, the church can do since it is only a small minority. However, the role of the Church in the society does not depend on its status of being a majority or minority. Thinking that the Church can transform the society only if it has majority indicates that we believe in the efficacy of the gospel only if there is political or legal power. The Church is the sign of the Kingdom, the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (Mt 5:13, 14) which is like a grain of mustard seed that grows into a tree (Lk 13:18-19) and like the leaven (Lk 13:20-21).

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[15] Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1.

[16] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, "The Fight against Corruption," (21 September 2006), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060921_lotta-corruzione_en.html. This statement is given following the International conference on "Fight against Corruption," organised in the Vatican by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace from 2 to 3 June, 2006.

How can the Church fight evils such as corruption? First of all, creating awareness and taking a clear and strong stance against them. For example, though the Church is a minority, the Church's strong stand against abortion can inspire many to evaluate their position on it. Corruption needs to be presented as a sin, both personal and social. Together with this, it is important that the Church tries to conscientize the society of the evils of corruption. Moreover, as a human society, the Church needs to strive to make itself a corruption-free community.

5.1. Corruption as a Crime and Sin

Whatever be the definition or description given to corruption or the classification, one thing is clear: Corruption is "an anti-social behaviour that portends danger to the cohesive fabric that holds a society together and to the integral growth and development of any society."[17] Corruption is immoral and prevalence of corruption betrays a latent decay in our moral values and orientation. "It shows our futile attempt to build a political society without a foundational reference to the religious-ethical principles of justice, transparency, altruism, accountability and a service-oriented notion of leadership."[18]

Corruption is a crime. Any organised society considers corruption as a misuse of power, an injustice, a violation of basic human rights of others, and hence punishable by law. Besides being a crime, religions, in general, consider corruption as a sin. Corruption as a human act, done by a morally responsible agent carries with it a moral guilt, because it goes contrary to established moral standards accepted generally or by a particular society.

Besides considering the negative effects of corruption for the society, it is important to consider the effect of corruption on the person who is the agent of corruption. Sin leads to the moral disintegration of the person, leading her/him away from living a life in accordance with her/

[17] Chinenye Leo Ochulor and Edet Patrick Bassey, "Analysis of Corruption from the Ethical and Moral Perspectives," *European Journal of Scientific Research* 44, 3 (2010) 469.

[18] A.F. Uduigwomen, *Introducing Ethics: Trends, Problems and Perspectives*, Calabar: Jochrissam Publishers, 2006, 201.

his dignity as a person.[19] Corruption, as it is against the values of integrity, justice, truthfulness and honesty that each person is supposed to live, is an alienation from oneself, leading to the disintegration of oneself as a person. Corruption violates many categories of justice. Corruption is a violation of commutative justice since a corrupt act involves deliberate transgression of obligations freely undertaken by an agent to a principle. Corruption is also an infraction of legal justice as a corrupt act directly affects the state's ability to assist its citizens in realizing the common good.[20]

But, do all these make any sense to the world today? Is it not just another unrealistic religious jargon?

Good governance, transparency and accountability are the necessary virtues in public life. Good governance, transparency and accountability demand that those who are in public life work for common good, that they consider the good of others more important than their own selfish goals. Even sacrifices to protect the good of others are expected of leaders and public servants. These ideals are ideals for public life, including political life, though as in many other cases, ideals are not actualised, as a result of which we often think that ideals are not practical.

Corruption negatively affects the ideal of universal human solidarity which is necessary to build up a better world wherein all humans can live peacefully. Thus, corruption works as an anti-human force in creating inequalities in the human society.[21] Corruption widens the gap between the rich and the poor: the powerful becomes more powerful, the rich become richer; the weak become weaker, the poor become poorer. Thus, instead of solidarity, corruption promotes disintegration of human society.

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[19] Osvaldo Schenone and Samuel Gregg, *A Theory of Corruption. The Theology and Economics of Sin*, ed. Gloria L. Súñiga, *Christian Social Thought Series*, No. 7, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Acton Institute, 2003, 17.

[20] Osvaldo Schenone and Samuel Gregg, *A Theory of Corruption*, 19.

[21] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004, no. 192; Vimal Tirimanna, "Corruption and Scandal: A Catholic Moral Analysis," 19.

Corruption affects all, but the worst affected are the poor. As Pope Francis has said in one of his homilies, "the corrupt politician, the corrupt businessman and the corrupt clergyman... all three harmed the innocent, the poor, because it's the poor who pay for the feast of the corrupt!"[22] As a result of corruption, the poor are deprived of the means to meet their basic needs. In his paper, referred to above, Justice N. Santosh Hegde speaks about a heart-rending newspaper photograph:

> About a year ago, a vernacular newspaper published a photograph from Karnataka in which I saw a picture taken of a lady sitting on the ground with a pot next to her and scratching the top side with her fingers; the article below the photograph said that she is hoping to get one pot of water, and to get that one pot of water she has to walk four kilometres and return 4 kilometres and the entire family has to manage with that one pot of water. It is nearly 65 years after we attained independence, nearly 61 years after we adopted democracy and, then, to see such a photograph and to read its title is really heartbreaking.[23]

Hegde refers to what Rajiv Gandhi said in 1988, namely, out of one rupee that the government gives for the benefit of the poor, only 15 paisa reach them. Not only food, water and shelter, but also basic facilities like education and healthcare become inaccessible to the poor due to corruption. Corruption denies to the poor the benefits of development. Public funds meant for the poor do not reach them, or they are diverted to other projects which will benefit the bureaucrats, politicians and corporates. Corruption favours unjustly and illicitly those who do not deserve such favours legally or morally. Doing so, they deprive the poor of their legitimate privileges. This is the malice of corruption.[24] John Chathanatt shows how corruption worsens the condition of the poor: The economic growth today widens the gap between the rich and the poor. The greed of the rich and big

[22] Pope Francis, "Sinners with White Glove," Homily on 1 Kings 21:17-29, 17 June 2014, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2014/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20140617_sinners-with-white-gloves.html

[23] N. Santosh Hegde, "Development and Corruption. Re-Establishing Justice for the Common Good," 45.

[24] Vimal Tirimanna, "Corruption and Scandal: A Catholic Moral Analysis," 19.

corporations for more and more money and profit is met, often with the support of the corrupt governments and officials who side with them even at the cost of denying the poor their basic rights. For example, in India we have seen this in the forceful handing over of the agricultural land of the poor to the rich corporations in the pretext of development.[25] The current debate over the "Land Acquisition (Amendment) Bill 2015" is to be understood in the background of the fears that the Bill will facilitate further such forceful acquisition of the land of the farmers and of the poor.[26]

Corruption is stealing; especially, it is stealing the bread of the poor. Fighting corruption is an integral dimension of the preferential option for the poor. So, the Christian commitment to the poor demands to oppose corruption in any form.

5.2. Corruption as a Social-Structural Sin

In recent decades moral theologians have pointed out that "One of the greatest failures of Catholic moral theology in the past was the failure to consider the structural problems."[27] Thanks to the renewal of Vatican-II, the Latin American liberation theologies of the 1970's, and the studies of other human sciences such as sociology and anthropology, today, in general, there is a greater awareness of social sins within the Church.[28] S. Arokiasamy underscores that the "'hardness of heart' spoken of in the Bible is not a matter of the heart of individuals alone, but also of the compulsions and oppressions which get embodied in laws, customs and structures of society."[29] That is, sin appears not only in the heart of humans, but is also incarnated in social structures

[25] John Chathanatt, SJ, "Concern Over Corruption: A Theological-Ethical Analysis," 325-326.

[26] For example, read "Government Looking for Common Ground to Break Impasse over Land Bill," and related reports, *The Hindu*, 5 July 2015, http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/govt-looking-for-common-ground-to-break-impasse-over-land-bill/article7387230.ece

[27] Hormis Mynatty, *Porposals for a Comprehensive Moral Methodology*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2008, 149.

[28] Vimal Tirimanna, "The Sinful Talk of Sin," 444.

[29] S. Arokiasamy, "Sinful Structures in the Theology of Sin, Conversion and Reconciliation," 111.

and situations that contradict the Kingdom of God.[30] Though human persons are the agents of sin, sin is often mediated through social institutions and structures. Gradually these structures attain a kind of autonomy and cause evil without conscious participation of the individuals. On the one hand individuals are determined by these unjust structures, but on the other hand they maintain and perpetuate them.[31]

Are persons responsible for the structural evil and its evil effects? We can say that though such evil is mediated through the structure, moral responsibility for sinful structures rests on concrete persons.[32] Regarding social-structural sins, one difficulty is that many may not consider themselves personally responsible for them. They may say that they are helpless in changing it and are just following the tradition or are compelled to act in that way. Growing to moral maturity demands becoming aware of and taking responsibility of the social dimension of our life. People participate in social-structural sin either by conscious participation and perpetuation of sinful structures or simply by the omission of possible action to change them.[33] Pope John Paul II has pointed out that social structure cannot sin by themselves because sin by its definition needs a human agent. Persons are responsible for social-structural sins. Therefore, one cannot speak about social sin as against personal sin.[34]

Corruption is a social-structural sin. On the one hand, we may rightly say that the corrupt are aware of what they are doing and of their responsibility. But, at the same time, they are part of structures that facilitate and promote corruption. Political structures that vests uncontrolled and unaccountable power on a select few, bureaucratic system that makes administrators the rulers of the people than their servants, legal system that allows misinterpretation and easy denial of justice, judicial system that often fails to punish the corrupt especially

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[30] Hormis Mynatty, *Porposals for a Comprehensive Moral Methodology*, 147.

[31] Hormis Mynatty, "Concept of Social Sin," *Louvain Studies*, 16, 1, (1991), 17.

[32] S. Arokiasamy, "Sinful Structures in the Theology of Sin, Conversion and Reconciliation," 107.

[33] Hormis Mynatty, *Proposals for a Comprehensive Moral Methodology*, 172.

[34] John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, no.16.

if they are rich and influential, structures that encourage illicit relationship among the rulers, bureaucrats and the rich, a social value system that considers money as the criterion of status though it may be acquired through evil means - all these are part of the structures that perpetuate corruption. As a result, the corrupt do not take the responsibility of what they do, but justify themselves that they are doing so as part of a system. Thus, they find corruption as practically legitimised.

Even decades after independence, in the Indian psyche, the leftover of the feudalist mentality may be still at work encouraging corrupt practices. Administrators and bureaucrats see themselves as superior, and not as public servants. Many people also are used to see them as rulers having the right of doing whatever they want, and to see themselves as servants who have to depend on the mercy of the administrators. Obtaining favours, even wrongly, is seen as a sign of special status and privilege. Certain elements in the Indian culture seem to facilitate attitudes that allow or encourage corruption. The caste system and Karma theory, which have philosophical and religious backing, have deep-seated impact on the Indian psyche, both in accepting corruption as normal and justifying it as one's right—the victims accepting it as something from which they cannot escape and the perpetrators considering it as their legitimate right. "Indian culture is more prone to self-regarding activities rather than other-regarding actions. Through a Karma theory and caste system this is protected and propagated even religiously."[35] All these contribute to the social-structural aspects of corruption, and hence a concerted effort and conscientization is necessary to fight corruption.

What about those who are compelled to offer bribe to those who are in power? Even they become part of the structural sin of corruption. Many may be helpless, but many feel that they are doing only what is normal. Thus the structures of corruption are reinforced. Many may

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[35] John Chathanatt, SJ, "Concern Over Corruption: A Theological-Ethical Analysis," Paper presented at "National Workshop on Moral Theology in India Today," Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore, 12-15 July, 2012. Subsequently published in *Moral Theology in India Today: The DVK National Workshop on Moral Theology*, ed. Shaji George Kochuthara, CMI, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2013, 322.

even justify bribery by saying that it is only a legitimate reward for the officials who try to help them; sometimes even investing extra time and effort. Feeling of helplessness strengthens further the sinful structures of corruption. However, we have to differentiate between those who offer bribes for gains for which they do not have a legitimate right, and those who are compelled to offer bribes for their legitimate rights. For example, a poor man/woman who is compelled to give bribes to get urgent medical care, or someone who is asked to offer 'speedy money' to get an electric connection for which he/she has a legitimate right. In such cases, it is extortion by the perpetrator, and the one who is compelled to offer bribe is a victim.

Sin is a negative and destructive relationship with the society, resulting either in the breaking of positive relationships or refusal to develop them, hindering both the personal development and that of the society.[36] A deeper understanding of sin includes its expressions not only in intra-personal and inter-personal relationships, but also in the socio-economic, political and cultural life. Call to conversion includes this whole fabric of the reality of sin.

5.3. *Creating Awareness and Collaborating with 'People of Good Will'*

The Church, the sign of the Kingdom of God, is not a temporal Kingdom, nor is it an other-worldly reality concerned about the salvation of souls alone. The Church should involve in every sphere of human activity. The Church also has the responsibility to become the voice of the 'voiceless' who are denied justice and dignified life in the modern 'polis' of democracy. Unless a concern for justice in socio-political system enters into our ethical reflection, we will not be addressing the real problems that people have to face. This clearly involves fighting corruption.

Are we able to communicate to the Christian communities the importance of fighting corruption and creating a just society? Somehow, our pastoral practices lack creating critical awareness. We become active only when our 'rights' are violated, or when our institutions are

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[36] Hormis Mynatty, *Porposals for a Comprehensive Moral Methodology*, 149.

ttacked. Otherwise, we are rather silent on issues like corruption that
ffects the whole fabric of the society. Even if we continue to speak
bout Church's role in the public square, the Church's role in civil
movements is more conspicuous by its absence. For example, the
recent anti-corruption movement to which millions of people
enthusiastically responded. Many criticised the Church's reluctance in
ctively participating in it. The Church does not need to launch a political
party or take sides with any particular party. However, the Church has
the serious responsibility of engaging the wider society, leading the
ight against social evils, and collaborating with others who are fighting
uch evils. Since we are a minority, it is important that we learn to
etwork with people of goodwill in the fight against corruption.

One of the important ministries of the Church is education. In India,
the Church runs a number of educational institutions, from Kindergarten
o Universities. Millions of people have been receiving formation through
these institutions. How much importance do these institutions give to
character formation and critical social awareness? Do we give sufficient
pace in the curriculum for value conscientization? Similarly, there are
thousands of people working in the institutions of the churches. Do the
churches manage to create in them a sense of commitment, not only
o the institutions, but above all to the well-being of the society, and
specially to take a clear stance against corruption?

.4. Is the Church Corruption Free?

Is the Church free of corruption? The Church, though claimed to be
livine, cannot be supposed to be immune from corruption since it is
lso a human reality. However, "corruption in religious institutions is
specially disturbing because these institutions and their representatives
re seen worldwide, even in secular societies, as moral authorities."[37]
Even in the past there were corrupt practices in the Church. However,
n recent decades, we have become more acutely aware of the presence
of corruption in the Church. We know that there have been accusations
gainst Church of misappropriation of power, of wealth and property.

Christoph Stückelburger, *Corruption-Free Churches are Possible. Experiences,*
Values, Solutions, Geneva: Globethics.net International Secretariat, 16.

Accusations of malpractices against the educational and other institutions of the Church are not rare. Especially in the context of the sexual abuse of minors, many have raised doubts about the structures of the Church. The Church still follows a hierarchical structure with the concept of divine election to the hierarchy. This structure and concept of power does not seem to promote much the values of transparency and accountability and makes corruption in different forms easy. In his "Practice What You Preach: The Need for Ethics in Church Leadership," James F. Keenan comments that the presumption to not subject Church conduct to standards of ethical behaviour has been a long standing one and that it is unfortunately, a presumption strongly maintained by bishops, clergy and laity. We insist on ethical standards in the public lives of politicians and professionals, but we hesitate about establishing those standards for our Church leadership. Not that the Church leadership is unethical, but that we not *ordinarily* subject the public actions of the Church leadership to the ethical standards that apply to everyone else.[38] It may be good to ask ourselves how many theological and practical arguments we find to justify some of the corrupt practices, direct and indirect bribery, favouritism, nepotism, underpayment to the employees in our institutions, etc. in our own institutions.

In the society there is a more profound awareness of justice, of the rights and duties of every person, and of personal dignity. People are aware of their right to have clear and accurate information. Hence, it is not enough that we are just, but we have to convince others that we are just. The institutions of the Church are not "owned" by the hierarchy or the religious congregations, but they belong to the whole community; they are only entrusted to the diocese/parish/religious community, which runs those institutions for the community and on behalf of the community. It is pertinent to ask how transparent and accountable these institutions are to the community. Moreover, accountability is not only in financial matters, but also in moral integrity and in whatever we do. We cannot have a strategy for the hierarchical authority, the agenda of which is kept secret, and another agenda to be presented to others.

[38] James F. Keenan, "Practice What You Preach: The Need for Ethics in Church Leadership," Annual Jesuit Lecture in Human Values, delivered on November 22, 1999, at the Centre for Ethics Studies at the Marquette University, 5.

Accountability becomes even more important in India, where the cancer of corruption, nepotism and favouritism is eating up the whole social life and justice, especially to the poor and the marginalized. Unless the Church is able to convince others that we ensure justice in our system, we can do nothing to counter this onslaught of corruption in our society. That is, the most important step in fighting corruption in the civil society is to make the Church corruption-free, so as to become a real "light of the world." Few Church leaders have spoken against the rampant corruption in the Indian society. Is it because we do not feel confident to speak about it? Is it because we are afraid that we will be told, "Doctor, first cure yourself?"

6. Concluding Remarks

It is our moral responsibility to fight corruption, without compromise. It is important to overcome the sense of helplessness and indifference in fighting corruption. If the Church wants to do anything meaningful against corruption, first of all, it has to ensure good governance, transparency and accountability in its own structures. It is also important that the Church gives ample space for socio-political awareness and values of public life in its educational programmes.

On the one hand, we feel helpless in the face of the all-pervasive corruption. On the other hand, we witness the honest, committed and relentless work of people to eradicate the menace of corruption. These efforts are greatly facilitated by the traditional print media, as well as the digital media, especially social networks. In India, Right to Information Act and attempts to ensure a strong Jan Lokpal Bill have given a new hope to people. In spite of the feeling of helplessness, we find a ray of hope in fighting corruption! The Christian virtue of hope inspires us to continue to work towards a society free of corruption, in collaboration with all people of good will.

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Religious Fundamentalism and Role of Religion in Civil Society

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Religious fundamentalism emerges when the authentic source and spirit of religion gives way to quasi-religion and religious perversion at the hands of some interested groups who manipulate religion for their own selfish interest or political, social and economic power. All religions generally teach and view fellow humans as co-pilgrims and colleagues for creating a new humanity characterized by love, peace and justice, whereas religious fundamentalism looks at members of other religions as a threat and enemy. The author explains the perspectives of religious fundamentalism and the fundamentalistic interpretations of religious scriptures which do violence to the authentic meaning and interpretations of scripture. He briefly examines the cases of Hindutva and the Caste system in Indian society today, and finally calls all religions to tackle religious fundamentalism together with a prophetic and critical spirit. The author, Prof. Saju Chackalackal CMI is the former President of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore, and currently the Dean of its Faculty of Philosophy.

1. Introduction

In general, fundamentalist tendencies have been prominently noticed among religions that assert the central place for the revealed texts of the sacred scriptures, especially Christians and Muslims.[1] However, it is unfair to claim that these two groups alone share fundamentalist viewpoints. A closer and impartial look at the doctrines and practices of various religious groups would indicate that almost all of them share

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[1]For example, Muslims believe that the Quran was revealed to the Prophet word-by-word in Arabic language and that the exact form of the text was divinely inspired.

it in one way or another. This is not to say that all religions are fundamentalist; but, it is a fact that no religion is immune to it. That is, it is not necessarily a religious problem, but a problem resulting from a particular human tendency to insulate itself from both internal and external threats which cannot be squarely faced through an intelligent (genuinely human and genuinely religious) mechanism.

Fundamentalist tendencies may originate from an identity crisis that prompts members of particular religious groups to an excessive inward looking and reinforcement of their self-identity with some militant thrust so that they would not mind even taking recourse to violent means to reassert their identity resulting from the newly constituted self-consciousness. A great difficulty with this process is their perception of the other as a real threat that needs to be either eliminated or, at least, quarantined. If this tendency is pushed to extremes, especially with the backup of (pseudo)-religious ideologies, it would naturally develop antagonism against every other person or group that does not subscribe to their point of view, leading to further religious and social fragmentation, isolation, and alienation.

2. Religious Fundamentalism in Perspective

In the wake of certain internal or external threats that a religion faces and certain rational challenges that the leaders (or sources of authority) of a certain religion cannot contain, it tends to motivate the latter to take recourse to idealizing the origins of that religion in an extreme form with the hope that this would sort out the issues for good. By and large, this move to idealize the origins and the claim of orthodoxy being tied to such an ideal would bring dividends to those in authority within the religion by way of barring or eliminating every attempt towards progress and transformation of systems. As the origins are made into the exclusively sacred model par excellence, any bid to transform and to move forward taking into account the changes within social and cultural scenario will be shunned as extremely unviable and, sometimes, dangerous to the identity of the religion and its faith content itself.

Religious fundamentalism accords a higher value and priority for doctrinal aspects of the religion even at the expense of intelligibility

and human transformation. It tends to create a culture in which what is accepted as right within its own domains is that which is accepted as unchallengeable truth. True fundamentals of any religion are important for its institution and maintenance. However, being unreasonably selective with regard to the identified fundamentals, giving them exclusive primacy at the exclusion of many others (like love of God and fellowmen, and the ensuing ideal of service, at least within Christianity, or loving compassion in Buddhism) is a challengeable one. Thus, they attempt to idealize a few fundamentals (at the exclusion of others), exaggerating them to undue proportions and according them the highest value without providing any rational or theological justification.

Interestingly, many of the fundamentalist religious groups tend to argue that the teachings that they impart to their followers is the *only* true one; in fact, they propose an outright rejection of the teachings of all others, baselessly claiming that none of them could be right. Usually, this is done by taking recourse to a narrow interpretation of their scriptures and traditions, and by implying that a true understanding of these religious sources is available only to them, and them alone. They have no difficulty in claiming that truth is exclusively available to them, as if all those who do not belong to their religion or sect do not even deserve to be treated as human beings, that reason and revelation are definitively known to them at the exclusion of all others. Then, salvation that is facilitated by that religion will be available to none but to those who subscribe to their teachings and practise them literally (meaning blindly).

Unverifiable claims resulting from a direct link with the Divine constitute a characteristic mark of most fundamentalist groups. They tend to look for people who make these claims, and accord them a divine seal, although both the claim and the confirmation can be challenged based on their impact upon the community and the individuals' and communities' interaction and approach to other communities ('the tree is known from its fruits!').

Against the Enlightenment dictum "think for yourself", fundamentalism implies that there is no need of thinking at all. What

they claim is just that the thinking has already been done, if at all that is required. What is feasible now is to accept 'the *essential* position/ teaching' wholeheartedly, without thinking further about its intricate dimensions. With a view to realize the universal concurrence to their point of view, which is impossible given the diversity enjoyed by humanity, fundamentalists resort to employ political pressure tactics. As religious authority is practically limited to a few domains, fundamentalist forces that are bent on universal practice of their pattern of thinking, gradually take recourse to political domains.[2]

A joint activity of religion and politics is the most deadly weapon in the hands of the fundamentalist forces. Together they would control every facet of human life, both at the individual and societal levels, by butchering creativity and sagacity. As fundamentalists spread hatred among the members of humanity, instead of enhancing bonding among them (as it is fundamentally expected of any religious group), they scatter them as best as they can through their vicious ideologies and unbecoming practices. Indian society is the best example in this regard. Fundamentalist forces from different religions, especially Islam and Hinduism, though both are known for their ideal of peace and harmony, incite sentiments of hatred among people, thus distancing each other first, inciting even violence and killing, which will then unleash an unceasing cycle of violence and human sacrifice.

A concrete task undertaken by many fundamentalists is that of status quo maintenance. Instead of challenging individuals and communities in the wake of unjust practices, these religious groups tend to affirm whatever they have been perpetrating. Even cruel and unjust practices like slavery and caste system have been not only externally approved. but were attributed scriptural justification. Justifying slavery to the slaveholders and approving various demeaning practices of subjugating

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[2] Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi is said to have stated as follows in his *The Islamic Movement*: "Islam desires, above all, that people should commit themselves entirely to God's Truth and that they should serve and worship only God. Similarly, it desires that the law of God should become the law by which people lead their lives… *Only when power in society is in the hands of the Believers and the righteous, can the objectives of Islam be realized*." Cited in T. N. Madan, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds*: Secularism and Fundamentalism in India, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, 106; emphasis added.

the lower castes by the Brahmins are said to be the easy way out to keep the fire of fundamentalism glowing strong, as it would continue to support and safeguard the interests of those who wield religious and political power.

Fundamentalism causes stagnation within the society by way of promoting various practices that would curtail human development. The Southern Baptists in the US are said to have fought to retain the practice of slavery in the nineteenth century and to maintain social segregation in the society in the twentieth century. Surprisingly, both these were fought on biblical foundations! While the society was progressing towards establishing equality and justice within its social relations, a fundamentalist Christian religious group struggled to retain the status quo, and to maintain inequality and injustice, surprisingly in the name of Jesus Christ and his 'Good News', which had clearly announced the kingdom of heaven where liberty, equality, and fraternity, would prevail. This model is irreconcilable with the claims made by these religious fundamentalists. We find the same tendency among some modern Hindu interpreters as well. Dayananda Saraswati and M. K. Gandhi,[3] for example, had advocated the practice of caste system in different forms, claiming that it constitutes the ideal form of social stratification conceived and promulgated in the Vedas. Although both of them claimed to have eliminated unbecoming aspects of the caste system based on birth or heredity, their theories were new incarnations of the same unjust social system, which would never treat human beings equally. The new interpretations of these modern revivalists of Hindu caste system had strong religious foundations. Both of them were not only unable to challenge those 'sacred' sources of social inequality, but also tried to divinize such a trivializing social institution to the detriment of future generations of Hindus. An unjust social stratification, given the authentication by a sacred scripture, would continue to perpetuate oppression than the liberation of the oppressed classes. In fact, despite their awareness of the horrific injustice done to the lower

[3] My attempt here is not to call Gandhi a fundamentalist, but only to draw reader's attention to a fundamentalist tendency that I find present in his approach to the caste system. His openness in many other critical issues would clearly indicate that he would not fit well into the mould of a fundamentalist.

castes for thousands of years, we find both of them attempting to idealize the origins (by referring to their origin in the Vedas).

The fundamentalist tendencies are found to be creeping in the religious, cultural, social situations and institutions. Many who have been marginalized by the powerful assume fundamentalist tendencies to insulate themselves from the powers that are unjust. As the fundamentalist framework is accepted as the norm, and as they begin to infuse the life of a community with fundamentalist perspectives or values, they wield more power than what was otherwise claimable for them in their normal circumstances of life. This makes the marginalized into marginalizers by creating a new identity through the techniques of religious idealization and social isolation: they just push almost all who do not subscribe to their fundamentalist framework to the margins; as they move away from the margins to the centre, they tend to eliminate even the margins for others!

3. Problems of a Fundamentalist Reading of Scriptures

Sacred scriptures of various religions have been instrumental in motivating religious followers to live a good life by performing right actions; that is, in general, we can say that scriptures have succeeded in providing an effective moral orientation to many. However, if we take into account some of the happenings in the history of humanity, which are said to have their foundations in the scriptures, we cannot but claim that they are basically founded on fundamentalist readings and interpretations of these scriptures. For example, take the case of the caste system perpetuated in India and the establishment of Israel as a geo-political national entity (with the political support of the 'developed' world).

Classifying a society in one way or the other is normal for the efficacy of social living. However, a classification of society leading to a rigid social stratification based on birth, and its perfect perpetuation over millennia in the Indian society resulting from a re-reading and interpretation of the Vedic sources (i.e., the *Purusa Sukta*) and the subsequent codification of an ethico-legal framework in the *Manusmrti*, both of which are given to the subsequent generations as divine ordinations, set the platform for the fundamentalist tendencies to

flourish. The rigidity of the social stratification went to the inhuman extremes of even suppressing any upward move of the subalterns through the 'sacrosanct' and, hence, unchallengeable religious, cultural, and political injunctions that seemed to shamelessly favour only those who remained on the top of the social ladder. This social ladder, in fact, emerged by the evil motives of the upper castes to retain and perpetuate their unmerited status in the society, for which they had even taken recourse to modifications and reinterpretations of the scriptures (which, according to them, was universally and categorically binding on all Hindus) to that effect. Looked at from a modern point of view, it is impossible to deny the fact that the codification of the law in the *Manusmrti* was, in fact, an attempt on the part of the then religiously and politically elite to perpetuate a social structure for their benefit. Such a structure was made viable and acceptable among the masses by way of ascribing divine ordination, which no orthodox Hindu would challenge or overthrow.

A similar dynamics seems to be operative in the case of establishing Israel after World War II. It is true that there are references in the Bible that Israelites were the chosen people of Yahweh, and that He had promised them the land. When we first read of the Hebrew people, they are presented as nomads little different from other tribes living around them. When they entered Canaan, or Palestine, they came as clans and patriarchal tribes with their flocks and herds. The revelation or their group consciousness that Yahweh has promised them the land of Canaan is, primarily, a collective *wish* on the part of a nomadic people, which was greatly accentuated by the continued pronouncements by their subsequent leaders and prophets. In fact, from political and geographical points of view, they were a landless people, who staunchly believed that their God and Protector, Yahweh, is powerful enough to provide them with whatever they did not possess. The biblical prophesies, in turn, play a pivotal role in enhancing the group consciousness of this nomadic people. The biblical imagery of a land of plenty is gradually transformed into a physical and political entity, and this is pushed to a geographical identity in the course of time. But, did it have any other backing than mere 'revelation'. Here, I draw on a fundamentalist reading of the biblical passages carried out

by the vested interests of the people of Israel, with the backing of the
political might of the leading nations in the post-World War II scenario.

Purity of doctrine as it is conveyed through the written word of the
sacred scripture becomes centrally crucial and un-negotiable to the
fundamentalists. They attempt to *freeze* the divine revelation and its
meaning and relevance to a single cultural milieu and linguistic tradition.[4]
The purity of revelation is apparently maintained in fundamentalist
religious groups by way of assuring that interpretations are given only
by those who would guarantee the pre-conceived purity, without in
any way inviting critical scholarship. The same strategy would be
maintained in religious instructions as well, so that only the conservative
intellectual positions are passed on to the new members.

There is likelihood that a scriptural religion falls into a fundamentalist
reading of its sources and history if the theological perspectives are
not integral or balanced. Some members of all religions accept and
promote only a 'surface' or literal reading of their scriptures. There
are others who do not even permit to translate their scriptures into any
other language than the original; if translated, it is never accorded
truthfulness, as a translation is supposed to be deficient in conveying
the original revelation received in a particular socio-cultural milieu and
linguistic framework familiar to those who received the 'revelation'.
Accepting the fact that there are certain expressions unique to a cultural
or linguistic tradition, I am reluctant to concede to the claim that a
sacred scripture loses its original value in translation. In fact, every
reading is a re-reading, and involves an interpretation that opens up
new vistas in understanding the content of the revelation. Any re-
reading and understanding, whether it is done in the original language
or otherwise initiates a process of understanding the truth in relation to
the living milieu of the one who reads or hears the content of revelation.
If this is so, naturally a translation is taking place during every

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[4] Barr lists three most pronounced characteristics of Christian fundamentalists: "(a)
a very strong emphasis on the inerrancy of the Bible, the absence from it of any sort
of error; (b) a strong hostility to modern theology and to the methods, results and
implications of modern critical study of the Bible; (c) an assurance that those who do
not share their religious viewpoints are not really 'true Christians' at all." James
Barr, *Fundamentalism*, London: SCM Press, 1977, 1.

re-reading. If a translation takes place in the case of every individual reader in making sense out of the text of revelation (and definitely the content of the revelation itself), how can any religion categorically deny the possibility of a linguistic community attempting to translate the original text into its own language by employing categories that have emerged from its existential contexts. In fact, I hold that only such a translation by the people and a re-reading on the translated text that would make the content of the scripture more at home than a mere literal or 'surface' reading of the same in the original language. The word of God, if it is the 'word of God', would naturally be capable of expressing itself in more than one form, and in more than one language. If this freedom is curtailed, a religion may succeed in maintaining its sacrosanct revelation, but sealed away for archives; even if used by people with fundamentalist orientation, they would be useful only to destroy humane sensibilities in the name of pseudo religious motives. If these same scriptures be of any vital importance to human society, they must be creative and pro-active within the living milieus of the people.

4. Fundamentalist Trends in Indian Society: Hindutva and Caste

Religion is a pawn in the hands of the fundamentalists who are intent on capturing political as well as (pseudo) religious power through any means. They have a preferential option for a particular religion (mostly in the form of a few selected fundamentals) as a strategic measure to ensure that power sources are tapped without any break even if that would involve ethnic, cultural, or linguistic backlashes among the people.

The contemporary Indian society is a typical example for the above dynamics. Among different cases available, the strategy adopted by the Hindutva forces and the caste system in the society may be taken for a short analysis. Those who are actively advocating a religious nationalism in the name of Hindutva are making attempts to give shape to a *homogeneous* national unity purportedly based on the fundamental religious identity of the majority religious community, i.e., Hindu identity. Hard-core Hindu nationalists have rallied together to form a typically double-pronged strategy to take control of the Indian polity. This includes making every community that is technically identified as non-Hindu into

a foe and the source of every evil that India faces in the present. The fundamentalist strategy that is adopted by the Arya Samaj, the RSS, and other Hindutva forces seems to provide us with a type in which they categorize people into two camps: 'we Hindus' and the 'others'. This division, though succeeds in maintaining the stronghold of the Hindutva forces, really weakens the unity and sovereignty of India as a nation (though it is not a concern of these forces at all). While promising to free Indian nation as a whole from all the problems caused by the 'others', they succeed in garnering the vote bank to serve their fundamentalist interests, but not necessarily the interests of the people.

To understand the fundamentalist rhetoric employed by the Hindutva proponents further, we shall have a look at the approach adopted by Golwalkar, the second supreme guide of the RSS, who maintained that the RSS is only a cultural organization concerned with national rejuvenation. It must be noted that the nation referred to here is the "full-fledged ancient nation of the Hindus" united by geography, race, religion, culture, and language.[5] From among these five, he would highlight the culture, or the 'national culture' as the important one, of course, placed only after religion (dharma), though it is not clear what exactly is meant by religion in his teachings.

According to Golwalkar, the non-Hindu people in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and revere Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but the glorification of the Hindu nation, i.e., they must not only give up their attitude of intolerance and ingratitude towards this land and its age-long traditions, but must also cultivate positive attitude of love and devotion instead; in one word, they must cease to be foreigners or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights.[6] It is sufficiently clear from the above and the ideological pronouncements of various RSS leaders that 'the ultimate objective of the RSS is *political domination through cultural homogenization*'. It must be said at this stage that what the Hindutva campaigners attain

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[5] M. S. Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts*, reprint, Bangalore: Jagarna Prakashana, 1980, 182.

[6] M. S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, Nagpur: Bharat Prakashan, 1938, 52.

with the caste consciousness, these Hindutva forces woo the lower castes: once again, only to serve their interests!

In fact, over the years, the upper castes have believed that the lower caste people have been created and sustained by God to serve their interests, and their interests alone.[8] In the process of affirming this with religious sanctions the upper castes unleashed oppressive structures that have been in existence in our society for millennia. It is observed in our Indian situation that socio-cultural degradation and economic deprivation co-exist, and mutually contribute to the worsening of each other. In most of the cases we experience that lower the caste, greater is the poverty and deprivation at all levels. Modernization,[9] involving technological progress, urbanization, etc., continues at a greater pace in India within the framework of democracy; although economic benefits have been fetched by these – but largely restricted to the upper and middle classes, mostly situated in the cities – none of these trends have been successful to radically alter the practice of social stratification based along the caste lines. The domination by the upper caste members and the cumulative oppression of the Dalits, for example, has not yet been eradicated from a highly caste-ridden Indian social life.

Not only the Brahmanic scriptures but also a good number of later interpreters of these scriptural sources, including some of the contemporary reformers like Dayananda Saraswati and M. K. Gandhi, have directly or indirectly contributed to the perpetuation of their lower status, as their teachings did not succeed in removing the degradation legitimized through religious doctrines which were treated as fundamentals of Hinduism.

The lower caste people were so desperate that they could not even unite among themselves, and the upper castes have taken advantage

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[8] "They [the upper caste Hindus] whip up the caste or communal feelings in order that they may continue their dominance... The caste allegiance still plays a prominent role and it is easy to exploit that sentiment for furthering (fostering?) one's own ulterior motives." K. C. Abraham, "Introduction" in *Religious Fundamentalism: An Asian Perspective*, ed. John S. Augustine, xii-xvi, Bangalore: SATHRI, 1993, xv.

[9] Modernization is an enduring programme of action that involves social transformation through intellectual reorientation and acceptance of the rational and scientific ways of thinking.

of their existential inabilities. We shall not ignore economical and developmental issues, directly related to the political alliances and the strategic planning of different governments, most of them having been voted to power also by a sizeable amount of voters from the lowest strata of the caste-based Indian society.

As the oppression and exploitation have gone to such an extreme that, in the modern times, the people belonging to these lower strata of the society have become self-conscious and conscious of their rights, strength, and dignity as human beings and members of the society so much so that they are finally motivated to come together and make their existence asserted. As this move begins to assert itself for the first time within the Indian social structure (which has complacently accepted the degradation of these people) we cannot expect a smooth landing at every level. It is calling for a definitive break from the oppressive past and inhuman structures, both of which have been accorded theological and ideological foundations by the *varnasrama* dharma produced and perpetuated by the Brahmin dominated Hindu religious ethos.

As the upper castes begin to realize that their designs are being dismantled, they take recourse to every available means – regardless of whether they are right or wrong – to perpetuate the status quo, naturally, to their advantage. Further, as the oppressed members of the society also foresee a reluctance on the part of the oppressing groups to concede to them their dues, the whole approach takes the form of a power struggle; in fact, it is a power struggle, but a legitimate one at that from the side of the oppressed. Even when there is no militancy in the strategies adopted, those who are at the losing end in this power struggle (i.e., the upper castes) will definitely make it feel like a militant move, so that they can get the support of the political machinery, which is mostly controlled by them. This is what is witnessed in India by the organization of the Dalits, though maintaining divergent religious affiliations. In fact, members of various oppressed classes are joining hands in this fight for their dignity and rights. Their determination cannot be broken, and they will win their cause by accelerating the networking beyond religion and region, among the lower castes, outcastes, the oppressed, and those who continue to suffer injustice in the society.

5. Promoting Religious and Secular Education to Root Out Fundamentalism

As we look closer at many of the conflicts resulting from fundamentalist ideologies, it is obvious that they all involve sinister strategies to harness power at every level of individual as well as social existence. Further, as they define the target only in negative terms of eliminating those ideologies or groups that are *fundamentally* against them, those who control the affairs will never cease to have control over others; nevertheless, these manipulative leaders would never enjoy total control. However, this vicious cycle is to be broken, if humanity were to re-establish its sagacity and supremacy. Normally, as is visible from history, no one would succeed to eliminate opposing camps altogether on a permanent basis; even if success is experienced at one point by the fundamentalist forces, one person or a group of persons cannot shut the door to truth permanently. Human ingenuity is such that whatever is said to be the boundary – affirmed by any type of authority – is traversed and new horizons are opened up, at least, by the succeeding generations. This is not a theoretical conjecture, but a historical fact. However, it does not mean that we should, then, leave fundamentalist forces to themselves saying that one day they all would crumble. Human beings or societies that are aware of the excesses of fundamentalist forces must rally together to restrict their advances, both among the educated and the uneducated. Instead of adopting a negative strategy to directly fight these fundamentalist forces – which would only give better edge for them to flourish by way of their emotion-building strategies – what I suggest is equipping the individuals and groups to counter this menace by way of a conscientization process, which can be well done through proper value education.

Fundamentalism has flourished in different parts of the world at a time when either the public education system had failed, or else the vested interests had restricted access to education to a few, mostly belonging to the elite classes, and strategically denying access to education to the members of the lower strata of the society. This is found to be verified in almost all religions and cultures. The best example would be the restriction of Vedic education exclusively to the *dvijas* (twice born); moreover, there are scriptural injunctions within the Vedas that had consistently and methodically ruled out any possible access to

education by the members of the lowest caste, *Sudra* and anyone from the outcaste (*Panchamas*). Indeed, these efforts initiated by the codifiers of the 'sacred' scriptures (*Sruti*) and the 'sacred' traditions (*Smrti*) were consistently maintained by the priestly and ruling classes, both of whom had a lot at stake if all had access to education.

A trend among the fundamentalist forces in the arena of education is to perpetuate indoctrination instead of education proper. Indoctrination is an attempt on the part of the priestly and ruling classes to use and misuse the mechanism of education to instruct everyone in the view of life and way of life already accepted by them without any critical reflection. Conscious and intelligent reflection is not at all expected of anyone within the parameters of indoctrination. Blind and unreflective acceptance of any doctrine is an unhealthy practice for a human being, much less for a religious person, as religion calls for a definitive faith assent, not merely a refusal and rejection of reason as a human endowment. Education proper must initiate those at the receiving end in the art of human reflection, which should have an open process of critical and creative interaction with the instructors as well as the content of instruction. In fact, nothing will be accepted merely because it has been uttered either by the instructor, or any dogmatic authority.

Instead of aiming at the maintenance of status quo, proper education should facilitate a critical perspective on anything that is presented to the students. One strategy employed by fundamentalism is to present certain statements as just definitive, unchangeable, and unchallengeable conclusions; they start with conclusions and would try to put forth certain premises that would lead us to the conclusion. However, the proper procedure, if it is open to the human dynamics of thinking and critical reflection, must move in the reverse direction: it should start with valid premises and, then, to conclusions, and to assent to them if they are true and convincing.

If this procedure is adopted, naturally, the grip of fundamentalist forces would weaken. As these forces are aware of this fact, they would fight to retain their control both at the policy level and at the execution level. However, it must be the concern of the society as a whole, and the government in particular not to lose control on liberal education. Education is worth its name only when it succeeds in enabling

everyone to open up their worldviews and vistas of life in a creative manner, imbibing the spirit of change in a proactive manner, and welcoming the possibility for a new life, although this dynamic life vision would involve also certain risks. Only dead or inert matter would fit into the mould of another; living is dynamic and vibrant, and restricting it to a mould designed by others of the bygone era would only curtail the human spirit from its noble potentialities. Indeed, it would not only be a denial of justice to humanity, but to the supreme spirit, who has created the human spirit to soar to the unseen and unimaginable heights of existence: that is an invitation to be human, and the fundamentalist forces shall not be given the edge to curtail and kill it.

Education must enable us to see the tricky strategies employed by the fundamentalist forces. Once understood to be deceptive in nature, many would try to be cautious in responding to such forces, and at least a few would strive to expose those deceiving agencies and their strategies, which would, in turn, assist others to move on an enlightened path to love and liberation, which are said to be the ideal foundation and goal of any genuine religious movement or institution.

A crucial event in liberating people from the clutches of fundamentalism shall be catechetical instruction. Every religion has one or other form of religious instruction. Most of the organized religions have a planned programme to initiate the neophytes into the religious teachings of a particular community, mostly done through a class of religious teachers. Although quite welcome is the procedure, many a time this technique can turn out to be counterproductive if the instructors have already become fundamentalists. A fundamentalist would always conduct instruction in religion by way of imposing religious doctrines and practices in an unquestioning manner. Many of them present their religious teachings from the point of view of their fundamentalist conviction, and would interpret the original sources to suit their ideology. A possible resolution of this problematic situation is to invite these new members to go to the basic sources; they should also be helped to distinguish between the essentials and the accidentals within the accepted core beliefs and practices. If they are given the tool to do this, and if they are encouraged by the enlightened in the religious societies, gradually, grip of the fundamentalist forces would decline. This can be further enhanced by teaching these religious students the

scientific technique of reading and interpreting religious sacred scriptures and traditions. Critical reading and reflection would, then, be part of the mental framework of all the followers of a religion. Instead of diminishing the value of a religion, such an approach would only enhance its core value and would deepen the faith experience of the followers.

Fighting fundamentalist tendencies, for example, among Indian Christians can be done by initiating the church leaders into critical theological training. Biblical as well as theological scholarship has gone a long way in understanding the foundations of Christian faith and in maintaining a balanced as well as creative outlook on Christian fundamentals, without sacrificing the basic tenets of the Christ-mystery. However, the good fruits of this scholarship will not be understood and appreciated by the church leaders if they are not given access to critical scholarship. A mere traditional catechetical discourse is insufficient in this regard. They must be given proper theological training, which, to my mind, also presupposes a solid philosophical foundation. Initiating church leaders to sound philosophical theories would give them ample opportunities for critical and creative thinking, and to appreciate the new and creative theological avenues opened up by the critical scholarship. This would not only give them theological opening, but would also give them a better edge to see through and to successfully fight the unsound reasoning put forth by leaders of some other fundamentalist or conservative Christian or non-Christian groups. If given this training, these leaders would be able to involve in a rather integral understanding of Christian teachings and would offer more creative interpretations of the foundational sources, thus inviting people within their reach or under their leadership to gain a proper understanding of Christ mystery and Christian living, with sufficient space for personal and local creativity and responsible response.

Education should impart a proper understanding of the very religious reality. A critical attitude towards religion is an essential requirement in the contemporary Indian situation. Anything promulgated by a religious head need not be accepted as final; the religious follower should be able to critically look at it, and then assent to it. Although this is the ideal, our recent experiences in the subcontinent with regard to the issues related to religion indicate that people are emotionally charged easily, especially when it comes to the matters of religion. I tend to

think that this is due to the lack of proper education (and the resulting maturity) that would enable them to distinguish between the essentials and the accidentals. It is true that there is a core religious experience in the foundation of any religion worth its name; however, this does not mean that the whole corpus of a religion is static. In fact, religion is a human reality that attempts to respond to the higher or sublime levels of existence. If it is a human reality, naturally it has to be a progressive one. What Wilfred Cantwell Smith has stated about religion is worth recalling: A religious tradition is "a part of this world, it is a product of human activity; it is diverse, it is fluid, it grows, it changes, it accumulates."[10] Without disregarding the element of continuity within any religious tradition, it must be said that the followers of religion must be trained to keep the proper balance between tradition and continuity, so that the dynamism that is part of being human can be safeguarded. As our analysis has already indicated, any inordinate swing, either to the side of tradition or to continuity, by mutual exclusion, would keep the fundamentalist forces active and thriving. Both religions and the state, therefore, have a responsibility in instructing people in the art of integrating religious tradition and continuity to keep the flames of religion glowing for enhancing and ennobling the human spirit.

6. Conclusion

Fundamentalist degeneration of our society does not happen overnight; but if we are not vigilant enough, any human system, including religion – even though it is the sublime expression of human aspirations – can easily fall into a state of degeneration. Hence, strategies such as ongoing religious and secular educational endeavours must be initiated to assure that human society remains finally rooted in its time-tested universalizable values.

The importance and value of human powers, especially reason, along with genuine religious faith, should be highlighted in our attempt to check fundamentalism. Religion, in and through various distorted affairs initiated by persons in authority (with fundamentalist orientations), may become a source that denies the right of human reasoning. Without denying the importance of mystery, which transforms them into a spiritual reality, religions have to become more accountable to people,

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[10] Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, 159.

which can be done only when human dynamics are to be justified based on rational principles. Both the state and religions should strive earnestly to enable youngsters to use their reason in a holistic manner, by providing proper education: let it enable them to flourish their human potentialities. Many practices perpetuated by religions are human in nature and, therefore, must be brought under reason's scrutiny. This necessitates an open acceptance of human elements within religions and, then, to chalk out an action plan in relation to the existential reality, by reinterpreting the revealed sources – not for the sake of militantly following the fundamentals, but for retaining and re-living the spirit conveyed through them – wherever it is called forth.

It is necessary that various human groupings entertain an interactive strategy. A thrust upon one's own ideology and practice at the exclusion of all others will gradually give rise to a generation that would be closed to all others; instead of this, what is called forth is to consciously strive for developing a generation that involves in a give-and-take policy on an ongoing basis. No human entity, including religion, is perfect in itself, and all are involved in a constant search for the absolute. Therefore, whatever is good and life-enhancing in any system must be accepted, appreciated, and appropriated; all who realize the positive value of the existing systems or entities shall see that they are taken to further heights of human perfection. A healthy interreligious relationship and ongoing dialogue will naturally bring people of various religious groupings together in the civil space for the welfare, peace and harmony of all in the society.

As we live in a pluralistic society, what we need is not the fundamentalist strategy of isolation and exclusion, but inclusion and integration, not by chopping off all differences but by facilitating differences within the matrix of an integral unity. For, what we constantly seek to realize is a living reality, which is dynamic and growing. However, lived encounters and shared experiences are missing among various exclusive religious groups. If these powerfully motivating and animating encounters and experiences could be re-introduced and re-lived, indeed, we would be able see the twilight at the end of the tunnel.

Church in the Postmodern Cultural Process Today

Kuncheria Pathil

The author highlights the present cultural crisis with the emergence of "Postmodernity" which is an all pervading new culture, ethos and new ways thinking and life-styles. The article starts with a short survey of the encounter of Christianity in history with the different cultures and peoples at the different periods of history. The European culture and society was built on the foundation of Christian faith and 'Christendom' became the all inclusive reality. The movements of Enlightenment, the emphasis on reason, freedom and human subjectivity paved the way to Modernity and secularization. The new trends of Postmodern thinking and current discourses invite us to realize the limits of modernity and western rationality as well as its cultural domination and the claims of 'absolute truth'. Postmodernity is a call to accept pluralism and the 'other' and to search the truth together, both friends and foes, Western cultures and Eastern cultures, Christianity and all other religions, all philosophies and wisdom. The author invites Christian theology to enter into a positive and critical dialogue with Postmodernity. The author Prof. Dr. Kuncheria Pathil CMI is currently the Associate General Editor of Jeevadhara and the Director of its Research Centre recognized by the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam.

Introduction

Christian Faith has a long history of two thousand years of relationship with all cultures and peoples by responding and interacting with them in a positive way. Although Christianity was born in Jerusalem within Judaism, its development and growth took place outside Jerusalem in larger Asia Minor and the Greek and Roman social, cultural and religious worlds.

Naturally at its origins it shared much of Jewish outlook and culture. The Yahweh who alone is the true God. Whatever was spoken about Israel was later applied to the Christian community. The first Christian community was typically Jewish in all respects, in beliefs, rituals, life-style and community organization.

This Jewish idea or vision of the Church was challenged by the Hellenistic and Gentile Christians, who belonged to another cultural world. For the Jewish Christians, the Gospel was meant for the Jews only and to those who were converted to Judaism. In order to become a Christian, one had to become first a Jew and observe all the Law and the Prophets, including the rite of circumcision. The 'Council of Jerusalem' ruled that the Jewish Law and tradition should not be imposed on the new gentile Christians.[1] Acceptance of the Gospel does not demand the acceptance of an alien culture and the suppression of one's own culture. Thus the particularism of the Jewish Christianity was broken through and a universalistic vision of Christianity emerged and triumphed in the early Church.

The apostles, evangelists and the early Christians were fully aware that the Gospel message was for all peoples and cultures and therefore they interpreted and communicated it in different socio-cultural milieu, and the different nations and cultures responded to it accordingly and the result was a variety of Christian Churches and communities and a rich diversity of New Testament literature. This period in general witnesses to the emergence of different individual/local Churches, which were fully local in culture.

The Patristic period also represented a high level of social and cultural interaction in the Greco-Roman intellectual world. The Christian theologies of Trinity, Christology, Grace and so on were built upon the philosophical foundations of the Greek thought both Aristotelian and Platonic. The voluminous and rich patristic writings and the works of the great Ecumenical Councils of the fourth and fifth centuries are a perennial witness to this intercultural theology of the early centuries.

The universalistic vision of Christianity contained within it also a universal and absolute claim that Christianity alone is the true religion meant for all. With the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine, the universal absolute claim of Christianity got official recognition and it became the

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[1] *Acts*, Ch.15.

only lawful religion of the empire. When the emperors, princes and heads of tribes accepted Christianity, their subjects also had to become Christians. The principle was simply, *cujus regio ejus religio*, and it was also endorsed later during the Protestant Reformation to solve the problem between Catholics and Protestants in Europe.

Christendom

The Christianity of the Roman Empire followed the political, imperial and feudalistic model in its life, structures, authority and organization. It must be also noted here that the passage of Christianity from the Biblical and Semitic world to the Greco-Roman world radically changed Christian theology and its method. It was a shift from the Biblical experiential faith to the doctrinal definitions and systematic rational speculations of the Ecumenical Councils and of the Scholastic theology using Greek philosophical systems.[2] The living God of the Biblical revelation became the God of Greek metaphysics. The Semitic idea of knowledge through experience was increasingly replaced by rational knowledge. God's revelation was no longer understood as God's self-communication in history, but as communication of certain rational truths about God.[3]

This self-understanding of the Church along the imperial and political model as a hierarchically and highly structured institution with uniformity, centralization, jurisdiction and absolute power had to pay its price. The rich diversity among the various Churches was suspected and at times condemned with the tragic consequence of divisions in the Church. The centralization of the Church by the assertion of the primacy of the Roman Church over the other Churches practically destroyed the legitimate autonomy and identity of the local Churches, and the concept of the Church as the Communion of different local/regional/national/individual Churches fell into oblivion.

Christianity became the decisive force and controlling factor in the West, and a new western European culture and civilization was molded with the

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[2] David J.Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission,* New York: Orbis, 1991, 194 ff.

[3] Jacob Kavunkal, "Evolution of the Understanding of Christian Identity in the Course of the Centuries", in *The Church in India in Search of a New Identity,* edited by Kurien Kunnumpuram and others, Bangalore: NBCLC, 1997, p.92.

patronage of the Church. This reality in Europe is known as "Christendom" where religion, culture, socio-economic system and politics became identified as one entity. During the colonial period it was this 'Christendom' that was taken to the colonies. Western European Christianity with its social, cultural, political and religious form was simply exported from Europe and imposed upon the natives of the colonies of South America, Asia and Africa without any consideration of their cultural differences and the formation of authentic "local Churches".

As mentioned above, till late middle ages, the Church played the most dominant role in the West in all areas of life, in religious, social and cultural, in ethics, politics, economics, education, aesthetics, art, literature, music and architecture. In many countries Christianity was the official religion and it wielded authority not only in religious matters but also in politics, economics, morality and in the whole cultural area. It was mainly due to the fact that the Western European society and culture was founded on Christian religion and values. Most of the Germanic and Central European tribes had been converted to Christianity by the missionary work of the Church, mainly by the religious orders and monasteries in the early middle ages.

By the 16th century the situation in Europe became radically changed. Roman Empire became disintegrated, instead, various Nations emerged and they asserted their authority, identity and autonomy. This spirit of Nationalism in various European countries, followed by the Reformation movements and subsequent divisions in Christianity triggered rapid social and cultural mutations and it totally changed the situation of Christendom. The dominant Scholastic philosophies and theologies were challenged and they were replaced by new philosophical and theological schools, movements and trends. The increasing process of secularization along with the new intellectual, social, scientific and technological revolutions challenged the authority of the Church and religions in public and civic life. Religion lost its hegemony and control in political, social, economic and cultural lives of people.

Modernity

The so-called 'Enlightenment' Movement in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries may be said to be the main historical factor for the intellectual,

social, political, cultural and religious ferment for a new age, culture and civilization. From God, Revelation, absolute truth, church and its teachings, traditions and doctrines, focus was tuned to rationality and human autonomy. Rationality and the absolute autonomy of the human subject were the two pillars of Modernity. Human person became the centre of everything. The human reason claimed the capacity to reach the objective world to be discovered and verified by science. The nature and all the natural resources were exploited by science and technology for the use and misuse of humankind and for the so-called human 'development'.

Modernity was a radical questioning of the tenets of medieval times and culture, the centre of which was the institutional Church, its teachings, traditions and practices. August Comte and his positivistic school announced that in the process of human development the age of Myths, Metaphysics and Religion will be surpassed by science and technology. Karl Marx predicted a social revolution and declared its agenda and programme in order to create a classless and equal society. In the Marxian thought, human persons and communities are controlled by the dynamics of socio-economic structures, which are the infrastructure. The superstructures of metaphysics, religion, art, literature, philosophy etc are constructed in response to the infrastructure. When the infrastructures are exposed, analyzed, criticized and challenged, the superstructures of society can be changed. Moreover, Freud and the schools of Psychology made explorations into human psyche and explained the hidden working of the Unconscious and Subconscious and the role and dynamics of archetypes in the mysterious working of human mind. In general, modernity made a strong criticism of the medieval times, its thinking, ethos, beliefs, traditions, and world views. It paved the way to the emergence of secularization in thinking, capitalism in economics, industrialization in production and labour and democracy in politics.[4]

We have already said that autonomous human subject with independent rationality is the core of modernity. De Carte's "*cogito, ergo sum*" was the beginning of the revolution of the triumphant human subject. Human person became the centre and the starting point. Rationality became the sole criterion of truth and reality. Human mind perceives the external world

[4] Stanislaus Swamikannu, " Modernity" in *ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Vol. II, Bangalore: ATC, 2010, p. 903.

instrumentally and mechanically and this autonomous reason has a totalizing tendency which erected binary oppositions and sharp distinctions of , objective/subjective, intellect/senses, reason/faith, theory/praxis, monism/ dualism, natural/supernatural, spiritual/material, soul/body, individual/society, determinism/freedom, analytic/synthetic, right/wrong, good/bad, true/false etc. Modernity thus provided infinite confidence in the absolute power of human reason. Western philosophy and Epistemology tried to explain how human person is related to the external world by the 'representation theory of knowledge': 'Human mind mirrors reality or nature'. This absolute power of human subject and autonomous reason provided great confidence along with the concept of progress, development, human dominion over nature, progress in knowledge and human emancipation. Creation of meta-narratives and mega-narratives and over-arching intellectual and conceptual systems claimed absolute certainty and universality of truth.

The "Structuralist Approach" may be placed as part of late Modernity and the background of Postmodernity. Structuralism tried to demonstrate that human subject, rational process and human creations are controlled by invisible structures of reality. Structuralism became developed in France as a method of analysis as well as ideology.[5] It was developed from three important sources, Structural Linguistics, Anthropological studies, and Structural Psychology. According to structuralism, every reality has a structure, consisting of whole and parts. Each part is fitted into a whole, and each part is intelligible only in relation to the whole; function of each part is in relation to the whole. All human phenomena and creations share some innate structures and patterns. This was established by the studies of languages, myths, stories and rituals of various peoples from various cultures. Cultural anthropologists as Levi-Strauss applied the method of structural linguistics and spoke about common biogenetic structures, same system of human brain structures, in other words, some common structural foundation for all cultures. Along similar lines are Marxian thought of the close relationship between the socio-economic infrastructures and the superstructures of religion, metaphysics, art, literature etc., and the Freudian analysis of the role of the Unconscious and Subconscious in the human

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[5] Guenter Schiwy, "Structuralism" in *Sacramentum Mundi,* Vol 6, Bangalore: TPI, 1978, p. 182.

behavior and the functioning of the mental archetypes, expressed in different ways in thinking, cultures and religions.

Structural linguistics made the major contribution to structuralism, the pioneer of which was the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. He pointed out that there is no natural link between the signifier (sound or image) and the signified (the meaning). Their relation is just arbitrary and conventional. The earlier approach to linguistics was to focus on the origin and development of languages by historical and diachronic studies. In the new approach the focus was on the synchronic aspect by describing the linguistic system and investigating its determinant structure. The process of composition of a text followed certain underlying basic rules with universal validity. The text or narrative is analyzed and its underlying unchangeable structure is exposed to discover the rules according to which it is composed and it is functioning. Then only its meaning can be understood and interpreted. By discovering the underlying basic patterns, one could understand and interpret any culture or text, since patterns are universal.

Structuralism in fact focused on the structure of the human psyche and the psychic unity of all humans. It highlighted the role of the unconscious in the composition of the text or in the construction of reality. It in a way undermined the importance and uniqueness of the text and the creativity and freedom of the author. As the structures are universal and constant, changes are only peripheral and merely in externals. The writer or composer is working in an automatic and mechanical way by making only some new arrangement according to the context of what is already there.[6]

Postmodernity

The apparently beautiful, attractive, imposing and gigantic edifice of modernity's foundations were challenged and shaken by the 'Postmodern' culture and ethos of contemporary times by radical questions to the autonomy of human subject and its absolute power of rationality, which were the main pillars of modernity. And yet modernity is still trying to resist these attacks, and according to many, Postmodernity does not mean the end of modernity. Many people understand post-modernity as late-modernity.

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[6] Gunter Schiwy, *Ibid.*

The Poststructuralist schools challenged the presuppositions and methods of Structuralism and its emphasis on universality, centrality, unity and absolute meaning. It called for a close and radical reading of texts. According to Poststructuralism, all texts, literature, poetry, philosophical and religious texts, should be seen and studied on their own, independent of their historical, cultural, biographical and political background in which they were produced.[7] In the poststructuralist thinking the meaning is not stable as there are no permanent structures and systems. There is no absolute and definitive meaning. "Believing that there are such permanent structures which give unity, universality and stability of meaning is itself put to doubt by Derrida".[8] It means that there is a plurality of signification and meaning in any text. There is a possibility of multiple layers of interpretation, and the one and the only final and definitive interpretation of a text is almost impossible.

Naturally the term Postmodernity indicates new trends of thought after the period of Modernity which we have described above. Whether Postmodernity replaces Modernity or it is a later period of Modernity which does not totally reject modernity may be discussed. Postmodernity is not one single system of thought, but an overarching complexity of new thinking and approaches developed especially by French intellectuals, literary critics, philosophers, and social theorists, such as, Lyotard, Foucault, Derrida, Baudrillard, Levinas and a number of others. They all proclaimed the arrival of new cultural trends, ethos, attitudes and life-styles as reflected in new intellectual thinking, literature, art, architecture, films, music, dance, politics and in several other areas of life including religion, philosophy and theology. They all raised critical questions and challenges to the culture of modernity, its presuppositions and foundations.

Some of the characteristics or features of Postmodernity may be described over against Modernity as follows: For modernity, reality is a unified whole as presented in metanarratives or meganaratives or one overarching or self-subsisting system, such as, Marxism, Capitalism etc. etc. They maintain order, stability, consistency, and they provide answers to all problems, and explanations for everything. Human subject and the

[7] Stanislaus Swamikannu. *Op. cit. p. 1066.*

[8] *Ibid.,* p. 1068.

power of rationality control everything. What can be fitted into the system is accepted and others rejected or they become less important. This leads to binary oppositions, such as, true/false, subjective/objective, right/wrong, good/bad, moral/immoral, etc. etc. The only valid knowledge is scientific, objective, and definitive, discovered and verified by human mind and reason. Postmodernity casts suspicion over or even rejects such meta-narratives or mega-narratives which excludes others outside the system that cannot be fitted into it. Naturally, postmodernity rejects binary oppositions as mentioned above.

Postmodernity advocates mini-narratives which are local without any claim of universality, rationality, stability and absolute certainty, but are of a provisional, temporary and fragmentary character. They do not make absolute truth claims. According to Postmodernity all rational systems have a totalizing tendency and are totalitarian in nature, similar to a totalitarian State or Party. In modernity, language is transparent and it mirrors reality outside. There is an essential link between signifier(sign) and the signified, and the meaning is definitive and final; but in Postmodernity the signifier refers to another signifier, which in turn refers to another signifier and its meaning is provisional, contingent, pluralistic and not final. For modernity the only valid knowledge is scientific knowledge which alone is objective. Storey-telling, myths, narratives, poetry, etc are fictions, secondary, irrational and imaginary. They are not considered as objective knowledge. For the postmodern thinkers, the so-called scientific-objective knowledge is also a narrative and not removed from fiction, story and poetry.

Thus postmodern thinkers want to demolish the monopoly of scientific knowledge as the only true and valid knowledge. They establish that there are different kinds and forms of knowledge, scientific, aesthetic, religious, political, historical, mythical, theological, philosophical with their different kinds of logic.[9] We are living in a world which is pluralistic, fragmented and ambiguous, where contradictions cannot be avoided. By affirming plurality and the other, postmodernists want to affirm the identity and importance of smaller people, neglected groups and their marginalized traditions. In the postmodern thinking, "friends and foes find themselves together in a common search. Fundamentalists are asking for a legitimate

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[9] Swamikannu, Ibid., p. 1065.1065.

space for themselves as liberals demand. Bereft of a common standard of what is right and wrong, it is said that all have their rights to express their views and protests".[10]

Any presentation on Postmodernity will not do justice, unless mention is made on the contribution of Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and his theory of *Deconstruction* which calls for a radical re-reading and interpretation of the text, classical, modern and contemporary, and their implications for the society. Indeed, he belonged to the French post-structuralist school and the theory of *Deconstruction* is his major contribution to Postmodernity. He rejected the Western Metaphysics of Presence, which speaks about self-presence of meaning according to which the meaning of a text is discovered by the interplay of three constitutive elements, the signifier(written or spoken sign), the signified(its conceptual meaning) and the referent or its self-certifying and self-sufficient ground. For Derrida, the signified is just another signifier, and the reader cannot get beyond the verbal signs to anything-in-itself to anchor its meaning. Therefore, in any text we cannot arrive at a fixed definite meaning which is universally valid. Meanings are continuously constructed and reconstructed by deconstructive reading. Text has to be read and interpreted in context and the context is discerned and determined by the community by a consensus. Derrida's deconstruction project is in favour of the poor, the marginalized and the weaker sections of the people. It is prophetic and ethical along the line of prophets to liberate the poor, the oppressed and the minority against the domination and vested interests of the rich and dominant groups of the society.[11]

Derrida rejected Western Metaphysics and its rational process of totalization. Totalization is a human rational tendency to look for a centre and goal to organize everything under it. Exclusion of the other by creating binary oppositions is its consequence. Deconstruction demonstrates that any attempt to unify everything by creating one structure or one theory is an attempt for totalization which excludes the other. It shows the irreducible differences and alterities in the text which makes impossible to totalize it.

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[10] *Ibid.*,p. 1066.

[11] Vincent Kundukulam, "Contemporary Challenges for Catechesis Today: Postmodernity and its Challenges", *Kristu Jyoti,* Vol. 28, Nos. 3 – 4, pp. 313 – 329.

Deconstruction shows the limits of Metaphysics which has a craving for totalization. Deconstruction is not destruction, nor is it an attempt to construct what you want to deconstruct. Derrida was often criticized that deconstruction is negative, a-political and neutral to which he repeatedly replied that deconstruction is a continuous call for resisting all totalizing tendencies and endeavours that would suppress "the other", and hence a challenge to take up political and ethical responsibility.[12]

Christian Theological Response to Postmodernity

Christian attitudes and approaches towards Postmodernity are diverse, complex, ambiguous and confusing. Naturally theological approaches to Postmodernity are diverse and even contradictory. For some Christians and theologians, Postmodernity is anti-Christian, anti-religious and even satanic; it is merely secular and clumsy philosophical speculations which is to be ignored and condemned. Some others see it more positively, promising and even as movements of the Spirit with fresh hope to overcome the crisis of religion and faith today.

Graham Ward in a rather comprehensive review article on Postmodern Theology points out the varieties of postmodern theologies.[13] Ward classifies postmodern theologies into two major groups, Liberal Postmodern Theologies and Conservative Postmodern Theologies. Liberals simply jump into the postmodern currents and ready to go to any extent even at the peril of their Christian tradition. There is an array of such writers such as, Mark C. Taylor, J.J. Altizer, Robert Scharlemann, Charles Winquist, David Ray Griffin, Don Cupitt, Richard Rorty and many others. Their views and theological trends are diverse and seem to be alarmingly varied such as, anti-foundational, anti-realism, linguistic idealism, 'death of God' theology, Christian atheism, nihilistic, a-theology, secular theology, theology as cultural anthropology, Monism and so on. In most of these postmodern writers, Christianity and Church have no future. It seems to me that most them are not strictly theologians as such, but thinkers, philosophers, cultural

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[12] "Deconstruction" in ACPI, Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Bangalore: ATC, 2010, p. 371.

[13] See, "Postmodern Theology", in *The Modern Theologians*, edited by David F. Ford and Rachel Muers, pp. 322 – 339. He also refers to the book of David Ray Griffin, *Varieties of Postmodern Theology*, and his own book, *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Oxford, 2001).

anthropologists, psychologists and linguistic analysts. But it is undeniable that they all announced the fact of linguistic turn, crisis of representation, end of metaphysics and meta-narratives, end of the autonomous subject and radical humanism, a crisis in theology and the question of meaningful human existence.[14]

Moderate and Conservative postmodern theologies are also numerous. Some of the French Catholic theologians, such as, Etienne Gilson, Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthazar, Jean Danielou, many other theologians, such as, Juergen Habermas, Raimon Panikkar, Liberation theologians, John Hick, Kaufman, John Cobb, Leonard Swidler, DavidTracy, Juergen Moltman, Jean-Luc Marion, Michel de Certeau, Gianni Vattimo., John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, George Lindbeck, have contributed to the postmodern theological reflections. Some of these theologians tried to employ the insights, lessons and analysis of postmodern thinking to re-read and re-interpret the foundational texts of Christian faith, its traditions, liturgies and doctrines and to construct new theologies at the margins of postmodernism.[15] Some of them have rightly pointed out that the logic of science, philosophy, religion and theology are not the same. They are different and they belong to different language games with different logics. Some went back to pre-modernity and made explorations into the Patristic literature and Mystical works which focus on religious experience and mystical experience without entering into rational and philosophical discourses, but offering the possibility of new life and hope, peace and harmony for humanity.

Postmodernity seems to challenge the Christian meta-narrative of 'Salvation History', where Judeo-Christian community has the central place and others are excluded from the salvation history or pushed to the periphery. The former has the privilege of access to the revealed truths whereas others do not possess it. The former has been elected as God's people, whereas others are to be evangelized. This concept is no more acceptable today and the Christian community does not seem to have the absolute confidence to proclaim this message, nor to teach with moral

[14] Graham Ward, Ibid, p. 329.

[15] Ibid., p. 323.

authority with its long history of dualism, exclusion, aggression and oppression of other peoples.[16] Every meta-narrative claims to be a universal perspective. In Postmodernity there is no universal perspective as such. For them universal perspective is no perspective at all.[17]

Any response to Postmodernity on the part of Christian theology which calls for a return to Biblical and Ecclesial Fundamentalism and Pre-modernity seems to be in the wrong direction. On the other hand, facing the challenge of Postmodernity, the Christian community and its theology cannot afford to abandon the chore of Christian tradition and its core values. The task is to reread and reinterpret the Christian tradition, the Biblical heritage and its values. The Postmodern Christian theology has to undertake this difficult task in a responsible and faithful manner. The Church has to be engaged in a constructive dialogue with Postmodernity in the spirit of Vatican II. I do not claim here to make any outline of a possible Postmodern Christian theology. However, some Postmodern theological trajectories may be just indicated.

It is undeniable that Judeo-Christian concept of God is by and large anthropomorphic as well as anthropocentric. God-language or God-talk is a very complex question. Christian theology of the past with the aid of Greek and Scholastic philosophy and the concept of analogy made elaborate discussions on the idea of God. But much of it was speculative, academic and rational. It could not escape anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism. Postmodern Christian theology tries to overcome this limitation. Indeed, even Jesus could not overcome the problem of anthropomorphism and he addressed God as "Abba", though he subverted the Old Testament concept of God as a ruler, judge, and dictator. Jesus emphasized the loving and compassionate God, one with the poor, oppressed, the least and the marginalized.

The Postmodern discussions on God are diverse and even contradictory. Some announce the 'death of God', others still think that the concept of God is useful, valid and Christians can still speak of God meaningfully, and the symbol of God is still functional. In order to escape from

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[16] Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age,* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997. P. 58 – 59.

[17] Ibid., p. 76.

anthropomorphism, some Postmodern theologians try to explain the relationship between God and the world in terms of Body and Spirit. World is the Body of God and God as the Spirit of the Body.[18] Theology has to attend to the contemporary experience of God, articulate and communicate it to the public, not in a rational, philosophical, speculative and academic manner, but may be, in stories, poetry, parables and different art forms. In the Postmodern world, the 'mystery' is much more present and experienced by people than in modernity, where science and rationality dismissed the concept and reality of mystery. Theologians like David Tracy spoke of a 'mystical-prophetic trajectory'.[19] Lakeland sums up the spirit of Postmodernity as follows: "Pray as if everything depended on God, but act as if everything depended on you... the only eyes God has are our eyes, the only ears God has are our ears".[20] God alone may be said to be the possessor of the standpoint of universality that relativises all human standpoints. God is that reality which enables free human agency, even at the price of divine self-effacement.[21] People experience God today not as transcendent, distant and mighty, but as immanent, closer to us, loving and compassionate, a kenotic or self-emptying God.

Here comes the location, meaning and relevance of Jesus Christ. In the Christian tradition the distant, transcendent and absent God is present to us in Jesus Christ, who is compassionate, loving and suffering God who emptied the absolute divine self and made visible and tangible in Jesus Christ. Christ is the Other of God. In Jesus Christ God met us, spoke to us and he is the visible God. We meet God in Jesus Christ, who is for us the face of God. The Christian tradition cannot abandon this core element of faith. The Church is the community of Jesus' disciples who follow their master in serving and reconstructing the world. As Jesus emptied himself, so also the Church has to empty itself becoming a 'kenotic church', a servant church in the world, taking to itself the fears, agonies and uncertainties of the world. As John Robinson had said, a servant lives in somebody else's home and work there.[22] Similarly the church has to live in the world and

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[18] Ibid., pp. 56 – 57.

[19] Ibid., pp. 93 ff.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid. p. 101.

[22] J. A. T. Robinson, *The New Reformation,* P hiladelphia: Westminster Press, 1965, p. 92.

work within the structures of the world, instead of constructing parallel structures. It has to be a partner and fellow traveller with all peoples without making absolute claims. Christian communities have to relate with all other groups and communities, social, cultural, religious and ideological, and create constructive and interactive networking with all respecting each other's freedom and identity. The Church has to endorse and promote pluralism, religious, cultural, ethical, social, economic and political.

Discovery of the 'other" is the most important characteristic of Postmodern theology. Rejection of meta-narratives is at the same time the encounter with and discovery of the other. Postmodern cultural world does not have one single centre, but multiple centres. The emphasis is not on the centre, but on the periphery, the local, the marginal, the little and the smaller. Each faith community sees the world with its own perspective, its own language. But in the postmodern religious scenario what we see is that each religious tradition is becoming diversified and increasingly pluralistic, may be, taking into consideration the diverse taste, needs, aspirations and temperaments of its votaries and the radical changes in the world. Within the plurality of faith traditions and communities, could Christian faith community make any universal claim, exclusive claim or special privilege? It is indeed a legitimate question. But the 'other' cannot be said to be totally incomprehensible. Inter-religious and inter-cultural communication is possible and it should be by all means promoted. Plurality calls for relationality. Can we still speak of the ecumenical principle of searching for agreements in differences and differences in agreements? Is a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer) possible? The questions are more important than their answers.

Conclusion

The Church's agenda must include a creative and critical involvement in the Postmodern cultural process today. Postmodernity and the postmodern cultural process is indeed very ambiguous. Postmodernity has both promises/hopes and dangers. Confusions are much more than clarity. The outstanding contribution of Postmodernity is the discovery of the 'other', pluralism, and suspicion/rejection of all meta-narratives which are constructions of the dominant social and cultural groups. Support and recognition of marginal and under-privileged groups is the strength of

Postmodernity. Re-reading and re-interpretation of all texts, classical as well as modern and deconstruction are the project and invitation of Postmodernity. Discovery of the limits of rationality and the multiple poles within the self and endorsement of "mystery" within the universe and within the human subject are the points of arrival. However, any return to pre-modernity and fundamentalism under the pretext of Postmodernity has to be rejected. We have to affirm the secular and human autonomy with the affirmation of human values and the spiritual meaning of life. Postmodern cultural movement is an ongoing process in society in all areas of human life, and Christian faith community cannot ignore it, but has to participate in it and contribute to it in a creative way.

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